ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

July 1986
$1.95 U.S.
$2.25 CAN.

CLARK HOWARD

SIMON BRETT

R[illegible]HY

N[illegible]N

E[illegible]HOCH

P[illegible]Y

T[illegible]COCK

V[illegible]NKIER

A[illegible]OSON

RYDER TR4HHO4 9APR 88 1 03
HALSEY ROYDEN
13466 THREE FORKS
LOS ALTOS CA
94022

0 387166

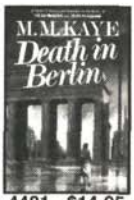
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Summer Reading For 99¢

3483 $16.95

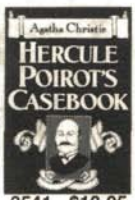
3491 $13.95

4473 $15.95



4481 $14.95

4499 $17.95



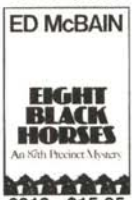
3541 $18.95

3533 $14.95

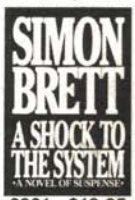
3863 $15.95

3871 $12.95

8920 $14.50



8912 $15.95



8961 $13.95

Any 6 for Only 99¢ with membership

Values up to $113.20 in Publishers' Editions.

How The Mystery Guild works: Get 6 exciting books for 99¢ (plus shipping and handling) PLUS a *free* tote bag when accepted as a member. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, if you are not satisfied, return the books at Club expense within 10 days. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

Big selection, big savings! About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), you'll get the Club bulletin describing the featured Selections and Alternates. Plus, up to 4 times a year, you may receive offers of special Selections – all at discounts off publishers' prices. To get the featured Selections, do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you prefer an Alternate or no book at all, return the form provided with your preference by the date specified. That date allows you 10 days to decide. If you have less than 10 days and get an unwanted Selection, return it at Club expense and owe nothing. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments.

Easy purchase plan! You need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during your first year of membership; then continue to enjoy Club benefits without obligation or resign at any time. The Mystery Guild offers its own complete, hardbound editions, sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more.

Ⓧ Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.

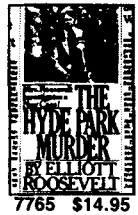
Guild editions save you up to 60% off publishers' list prices quoted above.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

3905 $15.95

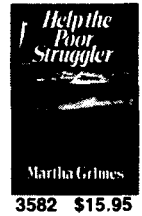
8953 $13.95

7757 $15.95

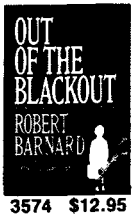


7765 $14.95

7773 $12.95

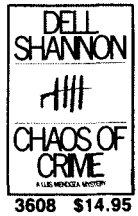


3582 $15.95



3574 $12.95

4507 $12.95



3608 $14.95

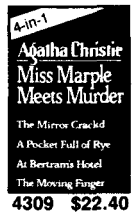
3590 $11.95

0968 $13.95

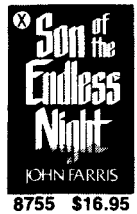
1040 $15.95

3020 $15.95

8771 $15.95



4309 $22.40

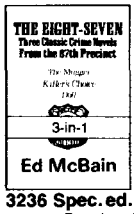


8755 $16.95

0687 $20.00

8748 $14.95

8730 $14.95



3236 Spec. ed.

3301 $16.95

0539 $16.95

2139 $15.95

3285 $15.95

Detach and mail this coupon today.

FREE TOTE
with membership

THE MYSTERY GUILD®
Dept. BS-037, Garden City, N.Y. 11535

Please accept my application for membership in The Mystery Guild and send me the 6 books indicated below plus my FREE tote bag. Bill me 99¢ plus shipping and handling. I understand that I need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during the first year of my membership to complete my commitment. My membership will be subject to the terms and conditions presented in this ad.

No-risk guarantee: If not delighted after examining my 6 selections, I may return the books within 10 days at Club expense. My membership will be cancelled and I will owe nothing. I may keep the FREE tote bag in any case.

1
2
3
4
5
6

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)
Address _____ Apt. No. _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
If under 18, parent must sign. _____

Members accepted in the U.S.A. and Canada only
Offer slightly different in Canada.

35-MG20

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harlequin Intrigue™ *Wants You!*

Calling all authors

Do you think you could write a script for *Remington Steele, Scarecrow and Mrs. King*, or a movie like *Romancing the Stone*? Then try a ***Harlequin Intrigue***.

There's no question romantic suspense is the wave of the future. That's why ***Harlequin Intrigue*** is opening its doors to new writers—to give you an opportunity to catch a rising star. All it takes is your writing talent and our know how. Here's what you need to get started:

Take one not-so-average hero and one not-so-average heroine and throw them into a plot packed with action, danger, mystery and suspense. Add equal parts chemistry and romance, and you are on your way to creating a ***Harlequin Intrigue***.

Show us your ideas...at least the first three chapters and a detailed synopsis. (Full manuscripts 70-75,000 words.) For a limited time we will accept agented and non-agented material, so don't put off today what may be gone tomorrow. ***Harlequin Intrigue*** is the vehicle you've been waiting for. Don't let the future start without you!

*ADVANCE PLUS ROYALTIES
*INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

For further information and guidelines, contact:

Reva Kindser
Harlequin Books
300 East 42nd Street
New York, NY
10017
U.S.A.

Marmie Charndoff
Harlequin Books
225 Duncan Mill Road
Don Mills, Ontario
M3B 3K9
Canada

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN

Our cover model this issue is
actress/comedienne
KIM SYKES

4 **The Spy Who Knew the Future** / Edward D. Hoch
20 **Curl Up and Dye** / Peter Lovesey
28 **New York, New York** / Thomas Adcock
44 **Another Dead Nobody** / Robert Twohy
62 **The Missing Baba Ryun** / Pat W. Murtha
75 **Easier in the Abstract** / Simon Brett
84 **The Patient Cup** / Avram Davidson
93 **Tom's Thatch** / Nell Lamburn
110 **A Piece of the Auction** / Jon L. Breen
119 **Never Leave Me, Dawn Patrol** / William Bankier
134 **Scalplock** / Clark Howard

71 **The Jury Box** / Allen J. Hubin

Note: indicia on page 159

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Jeffery Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"Why do you want me to go to North Yemen?" Rand asked Hastings. "I'm retired, as you seem to forget from time to time."

"Our investigation of this man Yanbu must be unofficial," Hastings explained. "We don't want the Americans thinking we've been paying money to a double agent . . ."

THE SPY WHO KNEW THE FUTURE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The young woman in the embroidered red turban moved quickly through the crowded streets of Taizz, ignoring the occasional shouts of would-be customers. Her gold jewelry, including a heavy golden choker around her neck, identified her as a *qat* seller from the nearby mountain area of Jabal Sabir. No one else in the small North Yemen city had a trade lucrative enough to afford gold jewelry.

Her name was Shahara and her attractive face was decorated with elaborate groupings of black dots—between the eyes, on the chin, and on her high cheekbones. They enhanced her beauty in the way that carefully applied makeup usually did. She seemed confident and fearless as she moved among the vendors with their melons and pomegranates, occasionally slapping away the hand of a stranger who mistook her for a woman of the streets.

Shahara's goal was the local telegraph office, a small musty room on the main floor of a bank building. She went about her business quickly, presenting the clerk with the coded telegram addressed to a man she didn't know in London, a city she'd only read about. He

© *1986 by Edward D. Hoch.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

counted the words and told her the cost in rials. She had the coins ready in her hand.

Leaving the office, she barely noticed the white-robed Bedouin who loitered nearby. Nomadic camel herders often drifted across the country's poorly marked boundaries, though one rarely saw them this far south of the desert regions. Her attention was attracted instead by a dark man in slacks and a sport jacket such as some of the more westernized residents of the city wore. He was tall and slender, and he seemed to have been waiting for her.

"I must have a word with you," he said.

Her business at the telegraph office accomplished, Shahara had more time to linger. The man might wish to purchase some of the mildly narcotic *qat* leaf she sold. He might even want a quantity of the leaf for a large party or a wedding—a sale which might bring her as much as two thousand American dollars. "I have business," she told him, not wanting to linger too long unless it was worth her while.

"Step around the corner here, where we can talk."

"You want *qat?*" she asked directly. "I sell only the finest quality."

"Perhaps." He put his hand on her arm, tugging at her silver-threaded robe. "But there is something else I must have first."

For an instant she felt a growing panic. The street was deserted here, out of sight of the vendors and shoppers on the main road. "I am not a—"

"I want the name and address of the man in London where you send the messages."

"What messages?" she asked, stalling for time.

His grip tightened on her arm and his free hand came out from beneath the jacket holding a curved dagger of the sort worn by most Yemeni men. "I have no time to waste with you. I want the name."

Suddenly the Bedouin was behind him, grabbing the arm that held the dagger. The man released his hold on Shahara and grappled with the other man in silence. She edged away, wanting to break and run, but held by the sudden terror of the onslaught. She saw the Yemeni slash at the Bedouin, catching his robe with the blade. Then both of them went down in the dust, rolling over and over.

Shahara couldn't see what happened next. There was a gasp and the Yemeni went limp. Then the Bedouin was on his feet. She turned to run, but he spoke to her in English. "Wait, Shahara! I won't hurt you!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her eyes widened at the sound of his voice. "Britisher?" she asked uncertainly.

"My name is Rand—I've come all the way from London to see you." He paused to catch his breath. "Excuse me, but it's been a long time since I've had to kill anyone."

In London a week earlier, Rand had argued vigorously against the need for the mission. "Spies are supposed to know the future," he'd told Hastings in the familiar office overlooking the Thames. "That's what you pay them for."

"We pay them to find out the future, Rand, not to divine it by mystical means."

"How do you know that's what Yanbu is doing?"

Hastings had sighed and opened the thick folder on the desk before him. "North Yemen has not been a particularly peaceful place during this past decade. Two Presidents were assassinated, in nineteen seventy-seven and nineteen seventy-eight, and there was a brief war with South Yemen in 'seventy-nine. The two countries are striving for unification, but it's a slow process—made more difficult by South Yemen's Marxist government. North Yemen was hit by an earthquake in 'eighty-two that killed more than two thousand villagers. It was at the time of the earthquake that Yanbu first came to our attention. He was a goat herder along the coast who claimed to have predicted the quake a full day before it struck."

"You recruited him on that basis?" Rand asked incredulously.

"We believed there were Soviet advisors at work along the border of the two Yemens, and the Americans feared another Russian adventure like the one in Afghanistan. In a joint venture with the CIA, we agreed to recruit a number of so-called border watchers among the nomads of the region. Yanbu has proven to be the most successful of our recruits—so successful, in fact, that we've become highly suspicious of him. Either he can really predict the future or he's a double agent working for both sides."

"Why do you want me to go there?" Rand asked. "I'm retired, as you seem to forget from time to time."

"Our investigation of Yanbu must be unofficial. We don't want the Americans thinking we've been paying money to a double agent. That's why I don't wish to send one of our regular people."

Reading over the background information Hastings had given him, Rand was strangely fascinated by Yanbu's story. He lived now among the *qat* growers of Jabal Sabir, quite near the South Yemen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

border, in an area where trade in that mild narcotic was handled exclusively by the women. Apparently he employed a woman named Shahara to dispatch his coded messages from a telegraph office in Taizz to a cover address in London.

Rand read it all over twice, including the part about Yanbu's strange predictions of future events, and decided, "I'll go. I'll look into it, but only for a week."

Now he was running with the woman named Shahara, then dodging into a convenient doorway before they were discovered running from the body of the man he had just killed. "Who are you?" she demanded to know. "What is a Britisher doing in Taizz dressed as a Bedouin?"

"Trying not to attract attention, and making a poor job of it. I was hoping you'd lead me to Yanbu."

"I do not know that name. I have never heard of the person." Her English was quite good and he wondered where she had learned it. Only one out of eight North Yemenis could read and write, and fewer than that spoke English.

"Then how did you know I meant a person?" Rand asked with a grin. "I might have been referring to the town of Yanbu, up the Saudi Arabian coast."

"You are clever," she admitted. "Why did you kill the man back there?"

"He threatened you with a dagger. I was afraid he'd hurt you."

"I could have taken care of him. I would have broken his arm and left him there. He didn't have to be killed."

"Did you know him?"

"No. But I don't know you, either."

"I come from Big Ben in London. You recognize the name?"

"I—"

"I come about the weekly messages you send from the telegraph office. I must see Yanbu."

They heard the shrill cry of a police whistle. "All right," she decided. "We must get out of here."

She led him through the alleys of the city to a place near the outskirts where her horse and camel waited. The camel carried several large bags of *qat* leaves over its hump and Rand waited patiently while she arranged for their sale to a sour-faced man named Gargan. "I dislike dealing with him," she confided to Rand. "But we must be away from here now. Can you ride a camel?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How far?"

"Ten miles."

"I'll learn."

"I have no saddle for her, but she is gentle."

The ride was bumpier than he'd expected, and after the first few miles he had to stop for a rest. "I'm too old for this sort of thing," he told her.

"If you can kill a man you can ride a camel."

"I'll tell you a secret. He rolled over on his own knife. I was as surprised as he was."

She laughed at that, then, turning serious, asked, "What do you want from Yanbu?"

"To find out if he can really predict the future. And now, with this attack on you, to find out if there's a plot against his life."

She thought about that, but offered no comment. Finally she said, "Back on your camel, Britisher. We must reach Jabal Sabir before dark."

Rand was relieved when she announced, finally, that they'd reached their destination. Shahara dismounted and he did likewise. They led their animals up a steep path running between terraced fields where the leafy *qat* plants grew in neat rows. She spoke to several men cultivating their fields, then led Rand into a little house perched on the south side of the mountain.

A white-bearded man sat in a comfortable chair near the window, a pair of powerful binoculars on a tripod before him. He turned as they entered and listened to Shahara's quick words in her native tongue. Then he smiled at Rand, but his right hand dropped to rest casually on an old British army revolver on the table by his side.

"I'm a friend," Rand said quickly, hoping he understood at least that much English. Possession of a British revolver indicated some contact with the language, though perhaps Shahara had given him the weapon. "Are you Yanbu?"

"You are disguised," the man said in English not as good as Shahara's but understandable. "A true Bedouin would know you for an impostor at once. But to answer your question—yes, I am Yanbu. Have you come all the way from England to check on the performance of your spy?" He laughed, as if he found Rand's presence in the remote area highly amusing.

"They sent me because of your report on the death of Ili Hassin. It reached London forty-eight hours before the accident took place."

"We will speak of that later," Yanbu said with a wave of his hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Shahara, bring fruit and wine for our guest. There is time for talking after the needs of the stomach have been tended to."

"May I look through your binoculars?" Rand asked.

"Certainly. You will get a good view of the border crossing."

Rand peered through them, adjusting the focus slightly. What he saw was a stretch of mist-shrouded land with a few blocklike houses and some squat trees and bushes. There were signs, too, of cultivated fields. "Your crops grow nicely here," Rand commented. "You must get more rainfall in this region."

"More than the entire Arabian peninsula," Yanbu confirmed. "As much as five times more. That is why there is little desert area here—and no Bedouins."

Rand had removed his robe and headdress. He helped himself to the melon Shahara had brought him. "And no oil, either, I understand. You do not share the wealth of your Arab neighbors."

Yanbu shrugged. "We have a profitable coffee crop. There are pearls off the coast for those foolish enough to dive for them. But of course it is *qat* which brings in the most money. My people spend as much as a third of their family income on *qat*."

"And what do you see through here? Yemeni men chewing *qat* leaves?"

"Sometimes I see people crossing over from the south, from the People's Republic of Yemen. You have read my reports."

"Why do you send the reports to the telegraph office with Shahara?"

"It is safer that way. She is often in Taizz with her delivery of *qat*. No one suspects her of carrying messages."

"Someone suspected her today," Rand informed him. "She was almost killed."

The news seemed to take Yanbu by surprise. He called to Shahara and spoke quickly to her in Arabic. She responded, apparently telling him what had happened. Finally, the bearded man turned back to Rand. "Who was this person you killed?"

"There was no time to ask his name. He carried a traditional curved dagger like most Yemeni men, so I assume he was one of your people."

"I thank you for coming to Shahara's aid. She means a great deal to me."

"Tell me about Ili Hassin."

The bearded man shrugged. "He died. I reported it to London. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cannot help it that the government chose to withhold news of his death until two days later."

"London claims he died when the government said. Either you can foretell the future or you had advance knowledge of a death ruled accidental."

"Some think of me as a seer," Yanbu admitted with the slightest hint of a smile. "I once predicted an earthquake."

"I know about that."

They were interrupted by the arrival of another woman. She was perhaps ten years older than Shahara and also wore a gold necklace and other jewelry that identified her as a *qat* seller. "Where is Shahara?" she asked with only the briefest glimpse in Rand's direction. "Did she hear about the killing in Taizz? A man was stabbed near the telegraph office."

"Shahara is preparing food for us," Yanbu explained. "We have a guest for dinner. Mr. Rand, this is Kara Sivas."

She shook hands vigorously and quickly explained why her features seemed a bit different from the Yemenis Rand had seen thus far. "I am Turkish," she explained, "but I have lived here so long these are like my own people now. You have come a long way to visit."

"From England," Rand confirmed.

Shahara came out of the kitchen holding a large bowl of greens and the two women conversed in Arabic. Rand wondered if Shahara was telling about his part in the killing. They returned to the kitchen together and Rand shifted his attention back to Yanbu. "Kara Sivas says the man you killed was Rualla, a Saudi Arabian who came here only recently. There has been some suspicion about his activities."

"If he knew about Shahara's weekly messages to London, he must have been on your trail," Rand said. "He was probably in the pay of South Yemen or the Soviets."

"No doubt."

"I know only that Ili Hassin was killed in an automobile accident. Tell me the details."

"The man was a high-ranking government official—the equivalent of your cabinet ministers. He was thought by some to be in the pay of the Soviets, and it's certainly true that he was one of those pushing for unification."

"A unification under a Socialist government?"

"Of course. He had many enemies, however, and there was recent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pressure to force him out. When I received news of his death in the car accident, I passed the word on to London at once."

"The British embassy at Sana reported that your information was incorrect. Ili Hassin was alive two days later and was seen at a state function in the capital. On the way home from that function, his government car was hit broadside by a large truck. He was killed instantly."

"Yes."

Rand sighed. "You see the position this places my government in? We cannot pay money to seers on the basis of their visions."

"Ili Hassin died as you say, but it happened two days earlier."

"What could the government hope to gain by delaying the news for two days? And how were they able to fool our embassy people?"

"A double, perhaps. That is not for me to say."

Rand didn't like it. "You sit up here in the window with your binoculars, watching the border to the south. How do you know what happens in the capital one hundred and fifty miles in the opposite direction?"

"Shahara and the other *qat* sellers bring me news. They deal with the wealthy and the powerful. They hear things."

"Did they hear that Ili Hassin was dead?"

"Perhaps."

The other woman, Kara Sivas, joined them for dinner. She talked about life in Turkey and of how she'd come to North Yemen because of her grandfather's stories. "Turkish troops occupied the region until Turkey's defeat in the First World War. He often told me of the beautiful land here and of a climate both cooler and wetter than the rest of the Arabian peninsula. I did not think when I came that I would make a living dealing in a narcotic plant, selling *qat* leaves and wearing gold jewelry."

"Why do only women handle the lucrative *qat* trade?" Rand asked.

"It is quite unique to the region," Yanbu explained, "and probably came about simply because there were not enough men. Most Yemeni men—over a million of them—have gone off to work in Saudi Arabia. They send money home to their families, more than two billion American dollars each year. The men who remain are needed to work the fields and harvest the crop. It is left to the women to sell it, at least here in the Jabal Sabir region. They have become wealthy, as you can see from these two."

Like Shahara, Kara Sivas wore black dots painted on her face,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but in a slightly different pattern. She had been a beautiful woman once and she was still attractive, but her face lacked the fire and the mystery Rand found in Shahara's expression. There was little doubt that she'd made a good living from the *qat* traffic, though. Her gold necklace was more impressive than Shahara's.

"How far away do you travel?" Rand asked her. "Do you ever get to the capital?"

"Sometimes. I go where the business is. We buy from the farmers that grow the crop, then sell the leaves in the cities and towns."

Rand took a sip from the goblet by his plate. "I've never tried *qat*. I suppose it's something I must do before I leave."

The two women exchanged amused glances and Shahara said, "You've been drinking it with dinner. This is a sort of *qat* wine we make."

"It's quite mild," Rand decided. "A pleasant taste."

Kara departed after dinner and Yanbu went to bed. It was obvious to Rand by this time that Shahara shared the bed with him, but she seemed in no hurry to follow. "Will you be comfortable here?" she asked Rand, indicating a cot in one of the rooms at the back of the house.

"Of course," Rand said. He'd slept on much worse.

Still she did not leave him. "Why did they really send you?" she asked quietly. "They don't trust Yanbu, do they?"

"Seers and soothsayers are always suspicious."

"He is neither of those. He is only a poor man trying to get along in the world. I bring home money and gold and he wants to earn something, too. He cannot sell *qat* so he does the best he can with that pair of binoculars. Sometimes he even sees something of interest down there on the border."

Rand felt a chill. "Sometimes? Those coded messages come every week."

"It was London that wanted weekly reports. There is not that much happening along the border. At times we must invent a mysterious crossing or two, a few gunshots in the night. And I bring him information when I can."

"You brought him the news of Ili Hassin's death in the auto accident?"

"Yes."

"Our man at the British embassy insists he was alive two days later. He knew Ili Hassin personally. There's no possibility of a double."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She shook her head, unbelieving. "We heard the later reports, too, and of course I checked them. One of my customers has access to reports of all traffic accidents in the capital. The fatal accident involving the truck and the car happened on Tuesday, the twelfth, as Yanbu reported. There was no such accident on Thursday, the fourteenth."

"Then the government lied."

"Yes."

"And yet—" Rand wasn't satisfied. Nothing added up.

"How long will you stay here?" Shahara asked. Perhaps she wanted to change the subject.

"Only until tomorrow. I seem to have learned what little there is to learn."

"Do you have a wife back in London?"

"Yes."

"That makes a difference. You're anxious to get back to her."

"I would stay if I could do any good. There is no answer here, nothing I can come to grips with. Ili Hassin, a leftist cabinet minister, died in an auto crash. It was on a Tuesday but it couldn't have been. It was on a Thursday but there was no accident on the Thursday. Yanbu reported it to us and a man attacked you with a dagger."

"I've always been afraid that the telegraph office was our weak link. I wanted to get our own short-wave radio and send the messages direct. I know Morse code and I could have done it easily, but London said no."

"They were right," Rand told her. "An unused frequency broadcasting in code would be immediately suspect. The regular telegraph service, on the other hand, often transmits ordinary business messages in code. The message is safer simply because it's lost in a flood of similar messages."

"But this man Rualla knew about it."

"Your movements were too regular. You went to the telegraph office the same day each week. There's something else that bothers me, though. I'm sure a bribe to the telegraph operator would have bought that London address without the necessity of attacking you with a dagger. Why did Rualla have to do that? Was there some time element involved that called for direct and swift action?"

She shrugged. "You are more experienced in these things than I am."

"Sometimes I think I'm too experienced. I try to make things more complicated than they really are . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He went to bed a little while later, pulling up the blanket on the lumpy cot to guard against the chill night air. Sleep came more quickly than he'd expected, and when he finally awakened there was the scent of morning coffee in the air. The sun was up and he could hear the sound of voices.

Yanbu and Shahara were in the kitchen with a visitor. It was Gargan, the sour-faced man to whom Shahara had sold her supply of *qat* the previous day. He nodded to Rand and went on eating the food in the plate in front of him. Yanbu said little, nervously toying with his coffee cup. Shahara, fresh from bed and wearing a loose flowing robe, excused herself while she went to dress.

"Are you British?" Gargan asked Rand.

"Yes. We met yesterday outside Taizz."

"I remember." He scooped up the rest of his breakfast. Rand decided he didn't like the man.

Presently Shahara returned, wearing a blouse, riding pants, and some of her jewelry. She'd taken time to apply her makeup, but today Rand noticed a subtle change. There were still the three black dots on each cheekbone, but between her dark eyes now were three short horizontal lines across the bridge of her nose.

Rand turned his attention to Gargan. "Have you come here to buy more *qat?*"

"That, among other things."

Shahara filled Rand's coffee cup. It was too hot to drink and he set it down to cool. "Beautiful country around here."

Gargan nodded and slipped a hand beneath the folds of his robe. Rand threw the cup of hot coffee in his face, following it, diving across the table to knock the man backward to the floor. Gargan was screaming, trying to get up, clawing at the Russian-made pistol in the holster beneath his robe. Rand twisted the weapon free and struck a glancing blow to the side of the man's head. He stopped screaming and lay still.

"How did you know?" Yanbu asked as Rand stood up.

"Shahara warned me. Her makeup formed three dots, three dashes, and three dots. She told me last night that she knew Morse code, and that spells SOS, the international distress signal."

"It was the only chance I had," Shahara explained. "He arrived here at dawn with a gun. I think he was planning to kill all three of us, but he wanted to find out who you were first, and whether you had anyone else with you."

"Rualla," Rand said, thinking out loud. "I'll bet he was working

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with Rualla. After I killed him, Gargan came up here to wipe us out. But why? Why all this sudden activity after so long a time?"

"Because Ili Hassin died on either a Tuesday or a Thursday?" Yanbu suggested.

"Yes, perhaps. Or because—" Rand stopped, then said, "Let's get him tied up before he regains consciousness. Then I think the three of us should take a ride over toward the border. I have a feeling this might be a busy day."

Yanbu was reluctant to venture down his mountain, but the three of them finally set forth, skirting the farmers at work in the terraced fields as they made their way down the winding road to the valley. There was no real road into South Yemen here, but a break in the mountains allowed passage of caravans and vehicles. It was the spot Yanbu had watched all these months and Rand was convinced that both Gargan and the dead Rualla had been assigned to remove him from his observation post. Perhaps the incursion from the south would not come today, but everything about the activities of Rualla and Gargan hinted that it was imminent.

"There's nothing to be seen," Shahara decided after they'd reached the valley on horseback and lingered a bit. "No one is coming."

"Don't be too sure," Yanbu cautioned, holding up a hand for silence. His sharp ears had detected something the others missed.

Presently Rand heard it as well—a low rumbling sound that seemed to be growing closer.

It was a full ten minutes before the first armored personnel carriers came into view, led by a scout car with a heavy machine gun mounted on the back. "What do we do now?" Shahara asked.

"Go out to meet them," Rand decided. He said a few words to Yanbu, outlining his plan of action. The man's eyes widened as he listened, but Rand held up a hand. "Just trust me. I'll explain everything later."

They rode their horses toward the advancing column. Rand was a bit uncertain of the horse Shahara had provided for him, but the animal didn't shy at the approach of the armored vehicles. In the lead scout car, the machine gun swung around to cover them and Yanbu held up his hand, signaling that he wanted to talk.

The commander of the advancing column of troops introduced himself as General Hammad. He seemed friendly but bemused by their sudden appearance in his path. "We wish to talk," Rand told him. "We have important news that will affect your mission."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My mission? What do you know of my mission?"

Rand turned to Yanbu. "Don't you recognize this man—the prophet, Yanbu? He's the man who predicted the earthquake and last week's bloody events in Sana."

"And he has news for me?" the general asked dubiously.

Yanbu spoke to the man in swift Arabic. Rand saw Shahara smile slightly and knew things would be all right. If General Hammad planned to shoot them, he would have done it at once. Finally, the general said, "Dismount. I will give you five minutes." He issued orders to another officer and led them to a nearby stand of rocks. He sat on one, taking some green *qat* leaves from a pouch on his belt. "Now talk," he said, chewing on a leaf.

Rand spoke in English, watching the man's eyes for any reaction. "Yanbu knew of today's invasion from the south just as he knows all things in the future. He knows what will happen if you continue this folly."

The general directed his gaze at Yanbu. It was clear that he was skeptical. "And what *do* you see for the future?"

Yanbu chose his words carefully, not looking in Rand's direction. "You will reach the capital at Sana tomorrow, encountering virtually no opposition. Ili Hassin, the supposedly dead cabinet minister, will be revealed to be alive and will be installed as President of the provisional government. But within thirty days he will have betrayed you to the Russians, who will land troops in North Yemen in response to Hassin's request. When you protest this, you will be assassinated on the steps of Sana mosque."

General Hammad had turned pale at Yanbu's words. He rose to his feet, spitting out the *qat* leaf. "You lie!"

"He did not lie about the earthquake," Rand reminded the general. "And he has proven his foreknowledge in many other ways."

"How do you know Ili Hassin is not dead?" he asked Yanbu. "That knowledge is top secret."

"I have seen it," Yanbu answered mysteriously.

Hammad glanced once at the scout car, where the machine gunner stood by his weapon. Rand tensed, ready to dive for cover if they had to. But when Hammad stalked to the car it was only to use the radio. He spoke to someone in Arabic and listened for a time. When he spoke again, he seemed to be angry. He barked some orders, then turned off the radio.

"Our conversation is ended," he told Yanbu. "Mount up and ride back the way you have come."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When they were out of earshot, Rand asked, "What did he say on the radio?"

"It was an argument about whether to proceed," Shahara said. "Nothing was decided."

The armored column did not move for more than an hour. The troops and vehicles simply sat in the valley waiting while decisions were made by unseen men. "They could still kill us at this range," Yanbu observed as they rode across the valley toward his mountain.

"But they won't. They believe in you and in your second sight. They believe it would bring ill fortune to kill such a man." Rand knew they were safe, but he didn't yet know if they had been successful. It was not until the column got under motion once again, turning toward the south, that he knew this latest incursion into North Yemen had been turned away with mere words.

In the house overlooking the distant border, Shahara was alone with Rand. She asked, "How did you know? How did you know Ili Hassin was alive?"

"Perhaps because there were two reports," Rand explained. "Let's consider it for a moment. Yanbu reported to London that Ili Hassin died on a Tuesday, in a car accident. An accident did occur that night, but Ili Hassin was seen and positively identified two nights later at a diplomatic reception. So he didn't die in Tuesday's accident. The government then reported that he died in a car crash on Thursday following the reception. But no such crash occurred on Thursday. So he did not die on Thursday, either.

"Was he killed in some other manner? That seemed highly unlikely, since the government could certainly have arranged an auto accident if they needed one. It seemed more likely to me that Ili Hassin himself invented the story of his death. The accident was ill-timed, and for some reason he needed to be at that reception before officially leaving the land of the living. Perhaps he consulted with a South Yemen official about the final invasion plans. In any event, I took the most logical conclusion as the true one. Hassin was reported to have died on both Tuesday and Thursday. He couldn't have died on Tuesday and he couldn't have died on Thursday, therefore he was still alive."

"And the rest of it? Guesswork?"

"Not entirely. It was logical to conclude that a link existed between the wrongly reported death of the country's only Socialist cabinet minister and a planned invasion from the Socialist south. If he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wasn't dead, then he planned to reappear after the invasion—as leader of the new government. I coached Yanbu on the nature of his prediction and they believed it. General Hammad turned back rather than die on the steps of the Sana mosque."

Shahara was staring out at Yanbu, who stood with his binoculars once more trained on the border. "He is a good spy. He knew, with your help, how to deceive them. But you know, he *might* be able to see the future."

"No more so than you and I."

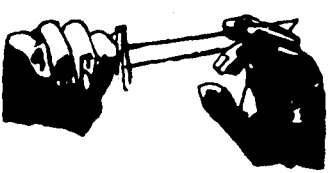
"The earthquake—"

"He was herding goats at the time. Animals are often restless for several hours or even a day before an earthquake, apparently sensing the first gentle rumblings deep in the earth. If he knew this from past experience, his prediction is no longer so startling."

"It's more than you could do." She was adjusting her makeup as she spoke, removing the black dashes from between her eyes and substituting the more traditional dots.

"Oh, I can make a prediction," Rand said. "General Hammad will feel that only Ili Hassin could have betrayed the invasion plan. Hassin will have become an outcast, unwanted by either side. His death may yet come to pass."

Rand's prediction came true three days later, but by that time he was back in England.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You are cordially invited to...

Rendezvous With Murder

on a unique mystery tour to England, the scene of so many classic mysteries. You'll visit the Old Bailey, attend private receptions with representatives from Scotland Yard and meet prominent English mystery writers.

As an extra-special feature, you'll participate in a "Murder Weekend" at a magnificent estate where you'll spend the weekend with a "killer." Here among the guests and staff will be a few less-than-genuine characters who will unveil a murderous scenario throughout the weekend. There will be plenty of clues (and a few red herrings) for you to follow. If you can figure out whodunit, an exciting prize awaits you!

But here's a chilling note: Each tour is limited to a very small number of amateur sleuths, so we recommend you reserve your place in the plot early. Don't miss this opportunity to play detective! Chills and thrills are guaranteed!

For FREE BROCHURE Call 1-800-428-7462. In California, 1-800-457-9515.

Or Mail To:
ICTS / InterContinental Travel
4133 Taylor St., Dept. DVP
San Diego, CA 92110

Name: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Telephone: (____) _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

PETER LOVESEY

"I'm a compulsive talker and none of your regulations are going to stop me," our narrator says. "People don't want a silent barber, do they? Talking is part of the experience. I've had customers —clients, I ought to call them these days—who tell me they come for the conversation."

A wicked new story from Peter Lovesey, whose recent novel, The False Inspector Dew *(Pantheon), is described by* Publishers Weekly *as "wonderfully atmospheric . . . fun all the way in the best British style" and whose story, "Vandals," in the December 1985 issue brought forth this comment from a Sacramento reader: "This is the excellent writing, fine characterization, and splendid plotting that distinguishes EQMM from others in the field. This is literature as opposed to mere storytelling . . ."*

CURL UP AND DYE

by PETER LOVESEY

"How would you like it today, sir? Amazing how fast it grows, isn't it? A quick trim all round, perhaps, just to tidy you up? You wouldn't want too much off. Not like the old days. This dates me, I know, but I go back to the wartime, shearing the rookies as they joined up. RAF basic-training camp. I was the next in line after the recruitment interview and the medical. If they got as far as me, there was definitely no escape. Fifteen heads an hour, I cut in those days. It was the war effort, you see. All done with scissors and hand-clippers. We weren't on electric. Yet I swear I never drew blood, and if I did I had my styptic pencil ready.

"You don't mind me talking as I work? I told them when I offered

© *1986 by Peter Lovesey.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

myself for this, don't expect me to do it in silence. I'm a compulsive talker and none of your regulations are going to stop me. I shall fraternize. People don't want a silent barber, do they? Talking is part of the experience. I've had customers—clients, I ought to call them these days—who tell me they come for the conversation. It's a bit one-way with me, I know, but you'd be surprised how much you can learn by listening. Politics, sport, last night's television, travel. I haven't actually been abroad myself, but the wife is an authority. You know the way some women sit up in bed reading those romantic novels? Well, my Brenda reads travel brochures. She has them stacked by the bed. Hundreds. She can tell you the temperature in Torremolinos, or how to approach an African bull elephant or haggle with a gondolier. I'm always learning something new from Brenda. She's sixty-five and never been farther than Clacton, but you could take her anywhere. The place she really wants to see is China. I say to her, wouldn't you settle for the Costa Brava and a Chinese takeaway, but no, she's set her heart on seeing the Great Wall and the pandas. So I saved up for years, and last summer we almost got there. It makes me hopping mad to think about it. I booked the China tour as a surprise. Paid the deposit without letting her know. The first Brenda knew of it was when I told her casually she'd be needing some injections. She was onto it in a flash. I've never seen her so excited. Then what do you think happened? A bolt from the blue. Disaster.

"How does the front look to you, sir? A little more to come off, would you say? We could train it across, or let it fall over the forehead in the modern style. If you ask me, it wants another half inch off. All right?

"My disaster. You just wouldn't believe what happened. I must tell you that I'd worked in the same shop in Battersea since I was demobbed in nineteen forty-five. A real, old-fashioned barber's shop with the striped pole outside and three adjustable leather chairs, the sort with head-rests. A bench behind where the customers waited and read *Picture Post* and *Everybody's*. The smell of Brylcreem in the air. This is before your time, sir. Two assistants and a boy to do the sweeping. Scores of regular customers. Men I'd known since their mothers brought them in as nippers and perched them on a piece of wood across the arms of the chair. I had the monopoly, you see. The only barber in Battersea High Street. There was Sally Anne's, the ladies' salon, across the street, and between us we had the haircutting business wrapped up. Not that I took advantage, mind. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

always charged the going rate. There aren't any overheads in barbering, if you'll excuse the pun. If people wanted to be generous with tips, that was another thing.

"Old Smithy, my boss, retired in nineteen sixty-two and I bought the business. Put in some nice chrome fittings and a few more electric points, but kept the character of the establishment, if you know what I mean. I was proud of what I'd achieved. Barbering is an honorable trade, mentioned more than once in Shakespeare. 'I must to the barber's, monsieur, for methinks I am marvelous hairy about the face.' *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. You didn't take me for a connoisseur of the stage, did you? Appearances can be deceptive. Take yourself, for example. No offense, but who'd expect to find a man of class like you in a place like this?

"To come back to last year, I was standing by the shop window in a quiet moment between customers one morning last July when I noticed something going on across the road. Well, not exactly going on. *Coming off* is what I ought to say, and what was coming off was the sign over Sally Anne's salon. Nobody had told me the place was changing hands, but in my time that particular business has been bought and sold seven times over. There isn't the continuity in ladies' hairdressing that you find in the gents' side of the business.

"Forward slightly, if you would, sir. Perfect.

"In the course of that day and the next, I kept an eye on the progress of the workmen. The entire shopfront was taken out and tarted up. Smoked glass with white gloves and top hats painted on it. A tiled surround. Even a ruddy door that opened automatically. A trifle over the top for Battersea, I thought, but maybe I'm old-fashioned. The real shock was yet to come.

"I don't have to tell you that ladies' hairdressing is a growth industry—if you'll pardon another pun. Anyone with half an eye can see that new salons have opened all over the country in the last ten years. I should think they've trebled in number. It's cutthroat competition. Look at some of the names they dream up. You've got to laugh. The Friendly Wave. Beyond the Fringe. How they think of them, I can't imagine. There's a salon down Bermondsey way called Shear Genius. But the one that really creases me is Curl Up and Dye. How about that?

"Quite still, sir. Wouldn't want to nick your ear, would I?

"This one across the street from me was called Toppers. Don't stop me now, will you? I'd like to finish the story if you've got the time, and I reckon you have. As I was saying, I saw the sign go up over

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the shop. Watched the fellows screwing it in place. Very up-market lettering, it was—black on silver, all glittering, like. Fair enough, I thought, Toppers might have more going for it than Sally Anne's. Best of luck. I hope for your sakes the ladies of Battersea go for it. Then I happened to notice there was another word under it, in smaller letters. I had to step outside my shop to see it properly. It was Unisex.

"I tell you, I practically blew a gasket when I saw it. Unisex. They were moving in on my trade. Right there across the street from me, without so much as a by your leave, chum. After almost forty years. I marched across and asked them just what the hell was going on. The young blokes said the sign was going on and that was all they knew about it—they were just the shop outfitters. If I had any complaints, I'd better address them to the management when the shop opened on Monday.

"Management! Do you know who they put in charge of that shop? Some young girl of seventeen. Maybe eighteen—no older. She looked as if she was taking a day off school. She had five others working with her. The only way of telling who was in charge was that this one chewed gum. Naturally, she wasn't the owner. She couldn't tell me who was. She took her instructions from a fellow called Stan who was coming to collect the takings at the end of the day. I told her I'd like a word with him, but of course I got nowhere. Stan sensed some aggro, and he wasn't staying to cop it.

"I tried several times to catch up with him, and then I thought, blow me, why bother? I'll take it up with the Chamber of Commerce. So I did. And what good did it do? Sweet F.A. 'We all have to face competition, you know,' they told me. 'It's a free market. You've had a good run. The day of the one-sex salon is numbered. Have you thought of expanding into ladies' hairdressing?' I won't tell you what I answered to that. No disrespect, but I'm a barber and I'll die a barber, not a blinking teazy-weezy.

"So there was no support from that quarter. It was pretty obvious that I just had to get on, or get out. My prices were competitive, and I did a good job. Nothing fancy, but who wants his hair shampooed and dried with a blower? All right, I lost a few of my younger customers. I expected to. If you ask me, it wasn't the styling they went for, it was the chance to chat up the talent over there.

"After a couple of months, I was feeling more happy about it. I won't say I didn't feel the draught a bit but I told myself it was worth sitting it out to see the competition off. I was kidding myself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"One evening at six-thirty, when the Closed notice is up and I'm locking up, some big fellow steps out of a Cortina and approaches me. 'Sorry,' I tell him, 'I'm closing,' but I can see at a glance that he doesn't actually need a haircut. He's as bald as a baby. He says, 'Smart thinking, squire. I can see you've got it all weighted up.' I say, 'What do you mean?' and he says, 'Like you just said, you're closing. Congratulations on your retirement. Shall we say next Saturday?' He steps past me into the shop and says, 'Not a bad place. A bit run down, but in a good position. You ought to get a fair price.' I don't like the sound of this at all, but I manage to smile and say, 'I think you're misinformed. I've got no intention of retiring.' To which he says in a low voice, 'It's been decided. Better put up a notice tomorrow. Let your regular customers know. And call in at the agent's by the station, they'll soon flog this for you.' I say, 'Who sent you?' But he won't tell me, so I say, 'What if I don't want to sell?' He just gives a shrug and says, 'It isn't a question of what you want, squire.' Then he walks out, gets into his car, and drives away. I've never seen him since.

"I suppose you're wondering what I did about it. Can't expect you to have heard about my little drama. I ignored it. Carried on as usual. Saturday came and nothing happened. Brenda wasn't feeling too good on Sunday. She'd just had her injections for the China trip. So we stayed in. No, that's a lie. I slipped out to the pub for a pint at lunchtime and met Humphrey Lawson, the fellow who runs the record shop next door to mine. He asked me something about the alterations I was having done to the shop. I said, 'What alterations?' He told me he'd been past the back of the shops on his way to church and seen one of those cement-mixing lorries backing up toward my place. I said it must have been a mistake, I wasn't having any work done.

"I forgot about it until Monday morning. Turned up at the shop and couldn't open the door. There was a two-foot layer of rock-hard cement right through the shop and the room behind. That's what the bastards did to my business. Forced open a window at the back and spread a ton of wet cement across the floor. I had to get the fire brigade to smash through the door, and then it was like stepping onto a platform. My head was touching the ceiling. All my stuff was ruined. Chairs, cupboards, plumbing, even the plate-glass windows. I was ruined. I mean, I faced a massive bill just to get the place into a state fit to sell to someone else.

"We cancelled the China trip and gave up the shop. Brenda was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heartbroken. She'll never get that holiday now. The shop became a launderette. My customers had to change the habits of a lifetime. It was a cut-and-blow-dry at Topper's for twice the price after that. All by appointment only and how about some of our special conditioner for sixty pence extra? When I found out what had happened, and why, I felt sick to the back teeth. It wasn't just my business that folded. This was happening all over London. One of the East End mobs had set up a chain of unisex hairdressers. They went under all sorts of fancy names, but the form was the same: move into a prime position in the high street, tart up the shop front, hire a handful of teenage girls for peanuts, and put the frighteners on the competition. Anyone who didn't agree to close got a weekend visit like mine.

"How are we doing, sir? I'll just run the razor up the back of your neck. This is one of the few things I managed to save from the shop. This, and my scissors and comb and the old-fashioned cutthroat I use for trimming the sideboards. That's a service you wouldn't get in those unisex salons. A cutthroat razor gives an unbeatable finish. Funny, I've become very possessive about my equipment since the shop went. I carry everything in this case. Won't let it out of my sight.

"You're probably wondering what all this did to my life. It's not *my* life I'm bothered about, sir. I had a good run. I don't care what happens to me. It was Brenda who took the biggest knock. She really wanted that trip to China. You've got to understand that it was the great ambition of her life. She's not the same person at all now. Shattered. No interest in anything. Just sits and stares all day. She's been to doctors, psychiatrists— She'd be better off in a mental ward, poor duck.

"As for me, I've adjusted pretty well. There's always work for a barber, and if the customers can't come to you, the obvious thing is to go to them. I thought of hospital work at first, but there aren't the openings that you'd think. Round here, it's all carved up between a couple of barbers who were forced out of business before I lost mine.

"You know, there are ex-barbers all over London who were clobbered by the same mob. All right, the law caught up with the bullyboys eventually, but we lost our livelihoods. We can't start up again. Most of us haven't got the capital. Don't ever talk to me about justice. What happened when the case came to court? Topper's was forced to close, and now there isn't a barber in Battersea High Street.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My old customers have a two-mile busride if they want a haircut. Crazy.

"Anyway, not to be beaten, I applied to the prison service. I thought prisoners need haircuts the same as anyone else, and I was right. They took me on.

"So here I am. I've built it up to four days a week in the last six months. That's three prisons, including this one. I don't mind the work. No tips, of course. They expect *me* to bring in cigarettes. No, don't ask me, sir. I've none left today.

"You have to be responsible working in prison, mind. It's all a matter of trust. They used to search me as I came through the gate, but they never found anything except a packet of fags, which I said was my own, and my barbering implements. I'd be a fool to try anything, wouldn't I? I mean, trying to smuggle a gun or drugs, or something? I find the vast majority of you prisoners very cooperative, as a matter of fact. Given a chance—and I am a compulsive talker, I admit—most prisoners talk quite freely to me. It's a sort of escape, I suppose, spending twenty minutes with a barber. Like a link with the world outside.

"That's what I tell myself. I'm performing a social service. I keep it as civilized as conditions allow. Just you and me in here and the screw outside. I said at the outset I'll take one man at a time. I don't want anyone behind my back, not when there's scissors in my hand. The next man comes in when I'm ready, and not before.

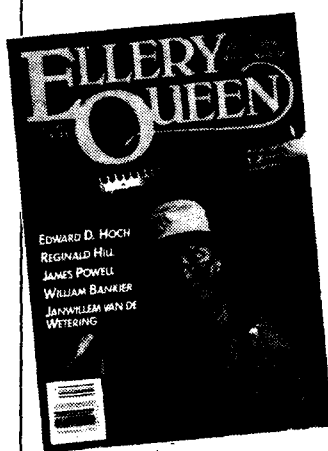
"Have a squint in the mirror, now, and see what you think. Nice job? And the back? Good. Don't get up, sir. I want to tidy you up with my cutthroat. Sideboards are just a little ragged, aren't they? A man like you is used to being decently turned out. Oh, yes, I know a bit about you, sir. Quite a lot. Picked it up here and there from my clients in the prisons. I know what you're in for. Six months, isn't it, for demanding money with menaces?

"Took me a while to track you down. I mean, I didn't know your face, and you wouldn't know me. I don't suppose you even heard of me, a big-shot like yourself. The man who came to my shop that Saturday night was just one of your bullyboys, one of dozens. You wouldn't know who he was if I asked you now. But I wasn't interested in him. I wanted to find the man who gave the orders. Barbering has its uses. Snip-snip. Snippets of information. I can listen as well as talk. You pleaded guilty, shopped a few of your mates, and the police didn't press the charges of violence that would have put you away for much longer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What I say is that prison isn't bad enough for the likes of you, ruining people's lives. Easy, sir—I don't want to strangle you. That wouldn't be a barber's way. I'm just pulling the strings of the cape nice and tight to get a grip. You won't feel much. I sharpened it specially this morning. Like I said, it gives an unbeatable finish."

A special offer for mystery fans...



DQG6Q

12 issues of Ellery Queen for only $15.97
(Save 24% off the regular newsstand price)

☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me
☐ Please renew my current subscription

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State____ Zip_____

For Immediate Subscription Service Call **TOLL FREE 1-800-247-2160** (in IOWA 1-800-362-2860).

Outside US and Poss. $19.20 (cash with order US funds).

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for your first issue.

☐ ALSO, SEND 12 ISSUES OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK FOR $15.97 (OUTSIDE US AND POSSESSIONS $19.97). WE'LL BILL YOU LATER.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Neil Hockaday story by

THOMAS ADCOCK

"Here's how this bunch stays afloat," Neil's talent-agent crony Sid Fortune said, spreading open the latest issue of Backstage *and pointing to the display ads. "There was a time when most of the ads in the trades was for parts. Nowadays most of the ads are for acting lessons and voice lessons and dance lessons, and cosmetics coaching and résumé preparation and eight-by-ten glossies. A good part of the money in show business in this town today comes from people makin' it off each other instead of off the stage."*

Here is Thomas Adcock's second police procedural about Neil Hockaday of the S.C.U.M. (Street Crimes Unit—Manhattan) patrol. The first in the series, "Christmas Cop," appeared in the March issue . . .

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

by THOMAS ADCOCK

Some places where I happen to spend a lot of my off-duty time are Yankee Stadium and any Irish saloon you'd want to mention between The Bronx and the Battery. At these fine establishments, they're forever playing Sinatra's rendition of "New York, New York" on the juke or over the loudspeaker. Which for some perverse reason seems to be just about everybody's cue to get all gaga, especially during the part where Frank sings, "If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere . . ."

I've got an uncle on the other side by the name of Liam who doesn't think highly of this tune. He's Dún Laoghaire's premiere Anglo-Irish workingman-philosopher and once he visited New York, which

© *1986 by Thomas Adcock.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he proclaimed "enough indeed for any man, though surely not nearly enough for the average beast." When he was in town, he heard the Sinatra song exactly twice, once at the ballpark when Don Mattingly homered in the sixth inning and then shortly thereafter at one of my favored pubs. He admired the game of baseball, which he quickly and cogently assessed as an "unfathomable sport to the European since it puts into play that most peculiarly American sense of infinite chance and time."

But like I said, he did not so much fancy the Gotham ditty. "It's really quite a load of old codswallop, Neil my boy," he told me between his fourth and fifth bottled Guinness stout, which he'd been well advised by mates back home was a nectar quite unsuited to travel, not to mention bottling, but which he drank nonetheless without the slightest complaint. "It's only so much booziness set to lyrics and melody, don't you see—a farrago of truth and lies meant to appeal to the most hopelessly hopeful amongst us."

I told him I couldn't agree more. That's because in my line of work I deal fairly exclusively with people whose sad and sometimes downright crummy lives turn the sentiment of the song inside out—people who couldn't make it anywhere else and wound up in New York.

It's been a long while since Uncle Liam's visit. I've thought about him, of course, but about that barroom chat we had on the topic of Old Blue Eyes' stale tune not until now that his words make so much sorry sense.

A couple of nights back, I had every reason to believe that I was about to launch a particularly rewarding new friendship with a particularly gorgeous new tenant in my four-story apartment building, an actress named Julie Todd who had recently taken a studio on the third floor. I saw her in the neighborhood spoon that morning and asked, "What's new?" She told me in a breathy rush how she'd won a role in one of those preciously arcane off-Off Broadway one-acts, something about cannibals and UFOs and Amway distributors as metaphors of the age.

Anyway, Julie was thrilled to a glow about it and so I naturally decided the moment was right for me to make yet another pass. So I did and the lady finally caught one.

We made a date for that evening to celebrate her success. I said I'd be by her place at eight o'clock with champagne and that I'd spring for some take-out Szechuan. I was ready by five. For three hours, I killed time with the tube, which was an agony. First there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was the early local TV news and celebrity babble hosted by a pair of toothy dimwits; then there was the regular local news, anchored by a blond guy in a virtual helmet of hair spray; then there was Dan Rather and his sweater vest; then there came some sort of game show emceed by a moron in a three-piece suit who insisted on kissing everyone.

And then I made my way downstairs to Julie Todd's threshold, to whatever promise of womanly comfort lay beyond. The door was ajar and soft music floated out into the hallway. I rapped lightly, then pushed the door all the way open.

Then right about the time I would have been pouring us two flutes of Perrier-Jouët, I was doing what a cop does when he finds a corpse.

Take one guess what was playing on Julie's stereo.

Neil Hockaday is my name. Officer Neil Hockaday, N.Y.P.D.—but that's too formal for the way I look most of the time and for what I do on the job. Which is why almost everybody besides my Uncle Liam calls me Hock. Even Julie called me Hock. She heard the waitress at the spoon call me that one day and picked it up for herself.

I work out of a special borough detail the department calls Street Crimes Unit—Manhattan but cops like me call the S.C.U.M. patrol because it's good shorthand for what we're up against.

Forty hours a week—plenty more if my sergeant isn't being hard-assed about my overtime (he's the sort destined to fill out a wide chair behind a wide desk someday down at One Police Plaza)—I'm out there in the streets all dressed down for the occasion. At home, I've got a special closet for my professional wardrobe, which I get off the rack at a Goodwill over on First Avenue next door to a social club where old Puerto Rican gents play dominoes and collect policy slips. I'm entitled to deduct the price of the garments on my income-tax returns as unreimbursed business expenses. So every year on my 1040, I exaggerate like hell and claim a hundred bucks off the top for greasy chinos, chewed-up jeans, all manner of second-hand polyester togs, and the occasional military-surplus overcoat that I have slightly reshaped by an Orchard Street tailor in order to accommodate my .44 Charter Arms Bulldog and its shoulder holster.

I spend a lot of time above and beyond trying to be a good and effective cop, lots of off-hours cultivating snitches and that sort of thing. I don't mind that all this time doesn't show up on my paycheck, but my ex-wife minded for me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I used to tell her, "Don't worry about it, there are lots of little non-cash ways I make it up." This line never failed to set her mouth off and running.

"Like *how?*"

"Well, I'm not crooked, but I can be bent now and again."

"Oh sure, sure. Like you claim that cockamamie hundred bucks on your taxes for those tourist clothes of yours and those smelly old bummy things you wear, too, and then you spend half the year convinced the I.R.S. is after you with a paddy wagon. Or you take a lousy provolone sandwich from the Greek at the deli and you're practically racing off to confession."

"They're not smelly."

Ignoring me, she'd continue. "Oh and we mustn't forget all those swell Broadway tickets you're always getting from that screwy pal of yours, what's-his-name."

"Sid Fortune."

"You would have a friend named Sid Fortune, for godsakes. You'll have to thank Sid for those last ducats to *Moose Murders,* which was laughed out of town ten minutes after the curtain rose. How come you can't pal around with somebody who'd do you a little good for a change? Somebody like Eakin. You went to academy with Eakin and you two were friendly enough then."

"What do you like so much about Eakin?"

"What's not to like? He's made lieutenant, he lives up in Rye in a house with a Jacuzzi, he's got three cars—"

"He's dirty," I added. "Someday the guy who holds the pad on him is going to collect. You've forgotten already about Knapp?"

"Oh, the hell with the Knapp Commission hearings. There were lots of crooked cops before those days, then a few of them became guests of the state. So what? I notice that New York's Finest still has a little room for goons and crooks. Don't be such a damn altar boy, Hock."

"You've got it way too simple. Before Knapp, you had no say about what kind of cop you were going to be. Now you've got the choice. You can be dirty or straight. And no matter which way you go, you're always sure of having at least one half the department behind you."

She clapped her hands. "A pretty speech, Hock. So?"

"So I'm saying there are shadows now. You want to be a good cop these days, you have to watch out which way the shadows are moving."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, to hell with your shadows."

It went on like this for years, until everything in both of us ached too much. So we split up and became a departmental statistic. Once in a while, I'd visit her in the house I used to own in Queens before a judge decided I didn't any more. Whenever my alimony check bounced, she'd ring up my sergeant and leave a lovely message. The real joke of it was that I got so lonesome in my little East Village apartment that I missed even her.

Now, most cops will tell you *they're* never lonesome like me, how all kinds of women are chasing them all the time. Maybe they say that because it's what they've been telling each other for so many years in so many lonely cop bars they've actually come to believe it. Maybe I shouldn't begrudge a guy his bodyguard of cozy lies.

Anyway, the first time I laid eyes on Julie Todd I experienced a minor philosophical miracle—it hit me all of a sudden how it was the human race had managed to survive itself. Because as cynical as I am about life in general, and sometimes women in particular, there I was just plain knocked dopey by the sight of her. Julie Todd and her pretty face and her soft, slim shape and those devastating legs of hers walked right into the greasy joint down on the street where I have coffee and eggs most mornings and I was as flushed as a crewcut kid on a Saturday night trying to pin a gardenia on some girl's spaghetti strap.

Julie was friendly enough, but only just so. You weren't likely to mistake her for a missy fresh from someplace where they put hot apple pies out on windowsills to cool off. She was what you'd call self-absorbed, which is like a lot of young women in New York—deadly serious about becoming the toast of Broadway and willing to do anything to stick around town until it happened. For instance, she took her coffee black and from the look of her shapely hips she'd never so much as passed a danish under her nose for a whiff. And she pored over the trades—*Variety* and *Backstage* and *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Show Business*.

The spoon is a small, intimate place. There's a beat-up marbled formica counter and eight stools, a short-order cook with a lot of black hair curling out from the neck of his T-shirt, and tired waitresses who come and go, one at a time. Then it was Sonja, a motherly type with dimples in her elbows and a hair net. Sonja took a big shine to Julie right off, for different reasons than mine, of course, and she got Julie talking about herself.

Of course, we guessed right off she was an actress. She'd done *The*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Best Little Whorehouse in Texas on Broadway, she told us; she'd had a number of supporting roles in American movies and starred in a couple of European features; and she'd been one of the leggy chorus girls who dared to wear short-shorts in some TV commercial for a depilatory. There was more to her résumé, too, and we were suitably impressed.

For weeks, I tried for her. I even shaved on my days off and started wearing things from my other closet in case my ex was right about the work clothes being gamey. But like I said, Julie Todd was self-absorbed. It wasn't until she got a measly part in some measly play that she joined me on the same wavelength.

And then I found her dead . . .

Her body was slumped on an antique divan. She looked as if she might have been sitting at one end with a leg tucked up under her and then fallen sideways after being killed. Her head lay on an arm of the divan, her eyes wide and glassy. Blood trickled from her mouth down onto the rug. The current issue of *Backstage* lay crushed under her.

I've seen lots of corpses, and every time I do I'm struck by the calmness they bring to a room. There was calm enough in that room for me to sweep through it and the rest of her place for any material evidence that might be lying around to make the D.A.'s job easy (none), check the fire escape (empty), and question neighbors (nobody home besides me). Soon enough, I could get away to drink and maybe to cry.

I saw red welts on her slender neck. She'd been strangled, more than likely by a necktie, and it had been a quick, powerful job of murder. It had happened no more than two hours ago. Any longer than that and there would have been that oddly heavy odor of death that settles into your nostrils and stays around for days.

I used some of the tissue paper that was wrapped around the Perrier-Jouët to cover the telephone receiver before I picked it up and dialed 911.

All that night I was awake. I stared out the window, or else I watched my old Philco. (My favorite Reagan picture was on, the one where he gets his legs cut off. But I didn't enjoy it as much as usual.) I also knocked back a lot of scotch and wished I lived a regular life. Maybe if I sold refrigerators at Sears & Roebuck or something like that I'd have a little predictability for a change.

I went down to the spoon when it opened at six, even though I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wasn't particularly hungry. When I told Sonja what had happened, she almost dropped a dish of poached eggs. Crossing herself, she sobbed, "Mary, mother of Christ, no! Who done it?"

I told her what I could, which was only that the case was under investigation by the detectives of the Ninth Precinct.

"What are you goin' to do about it, Hock?"

"I'm going to stay out of it, Sonja, that's what. Homicide's not my line, except sometimes by accident. Besides, I don't like making the job personal. It's hard enough working with strangers."

"She told me she kind of liked you, Hock. I ain't sayin' it woulda been some heavy-duty number for you, if you know what I mean, but she didn't have no beaux in her life, neither, so who knows? Anyways, she had a thing for you."

I was surprised that Julie had confided something like that to anyone at the spoon, even good old mother Sonja. "When did she say that?"

"Oh, Julie and me, we had plenty of nice talks." She wiped a tear from one eye. Then she undid her apron strings, pushed the net back over the top of her head, and ran a few fingers through her coarse red hair the way a moony teenaged girl might do it if she imagined herself a film goddess. "Maybe you won't believe it, but once a long time ago I was a dishy young thing myself. I wanted to be an actress, too." She stood, her big homely head uptilted, that apron big enough to cover a Kelvinator hanging loose, and she told the hairy cook, "I just can't go on today!" I wanted to laugh at her and felt lousy about myself for it.

I was punchy from shock and booze and no sleep and I was trying to keep from thinking about Julie and who had killed her and why—and I had to be uptown at work in a few hours. Just my luck, I was posted that week on decoy duty smack in the heart of the theater world—Times Square.

I went upstairs to my flat and caught a few hours of shuteye, but it didn't help much dreaming about a dead lady. I woke up sweating and knowing it was all somehow going to get very personal and there was nothing I could do about it.

Decoy assignments come up for me once in a while, especially at the height of the summer tourist season when out-of-town marks go with Times Square like rednecks go with white socks. New Yorkers pretty much surrender the town to this crowd, whose interests are pretty much splashy musicals (so long as the casts have plenty of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recognizable TV stars) and browsing for goods and services in the vicinity of Forty-second Street and Eighth Avenue, which contains most of what they're opposed to back home.

So there I was on what we call The Deuce, which is quite a Broadway show in itself. It's got comedy, drama, and tragedy and all without rehearsals. For my ensemble, I'd chosen a powder-blue leisure suit that felt like fiber glass and a beige short-sleeved rayon shirt, open at the neck to display a vinyl shark's tooth on a pendant. I'd blow-dried my hair and splashed Brut all over myself. I wore beige patent-leather shoes and a matching beige patent-leather belt with a buckle that said "Chuck." I don't know what the outfit would go for out in Moline or Dubuque or Tulsa, but it set me back seven bucks and change at the Goodwill.

The possibilities for making money on The Deuce are many: mugging, boosting, check-forging, and dealing in drugs. Phony drugs, stolen merchandise, sex, blood, credit cards, telephone credit numbers, and gold chains. Mainly, I try to prevent street hustles from causing long-lasting damage by, among other things, offering myself as a "vic" (victim, tourist species) to the indigenous entrepreneurs of the Great White Way.

In my first three hours' loitering up and down The Deuce and around the corner on The Stroll (Eighth Avenue), I declined the opportunity to buy an assorted case of Valium, Placidil, Tuinal, codeine, and Tylenol No. 4 at a special close-out rate. I passed up a half price offering on "collector's editions" of some magazine called *Spank Buddies*. I advised a pair of grannies from Topeka with beehive hairdos that it wasn't a good idea to bet the egg money on the three-card Monte game they were watching outside a fried-chicken parlor. And I gave a guy with a suit like mine (only his was lime green, with a Kiwanis lapel-pin) directions to a place near the Seventh Avenue Nedick's called Mistress Tatiana's Temple of Titillating Terror. I also gave the brush to maybe a half dozen transvestite pross, which made me think back to the time a few years ago when some pup running for City Council said the cops weren't doing enough to clean up Times Square, which he described as having "a wide divergence between image and reality." He was from Staten Island, so you know he hadn't been on speaking terms with reality in years, anyway.

All that time and I didn't come onto anyone throwing bricks—which on The Deuce means committing a felony—so just for the practice, I put the collar on a couple of young commuters from the South

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bronx who were palming off lactose and Sugar Twin to some vic in an Ohio State windbreaker who was in the market for heroin. One of the perps said to me, "Hey, Murphy, have a heart, man! This stuff's just whack, dig? All's we done is give this vic a whack attack. Man, all you got's a consumer ripoff on us." He had a good point—but then again, you never know what kind of good you might do the world by taking guys like this off the streets for an hour or so.

When I finished up with the punks at the Times Square station house, I bought a frankfurter and a cream soda from a street vendor who had a radio going on his cart. So what else? Sinatra was at it again with the opening lyric. "Start spreadin' the noooooooz . . ."

I didn't stick around to hear the rest. I wanted to see my friend Sid Fortune. He was someone who might help me answer some of the questions making knots of my brain—questions about the theater, about image versus reality, about Julie Todd.

Sid has two rooms over a magic shop on Broadway. Both these places have seen better days. The owner of the magic shop used to make props for Harry Houdini, but now most of his business comes from selling whoopee cushions to the spillover crowd from a nearby Hawaiian nightclub popular with folks who enjoy the wit and sophistication of drinks with little paper umbrellas in them. The guy in the magic shop also owns the building and feels a little sorry for Sid, so he gives him a break on the rent. That's a very lucky thing for Sid, who doesn't do so well any more as the last of a breed of Broadway dinosaur—the independent talent agent.

"Everyone in the business is hooked up with I.C.M. or William Morris now," Sid complained to me once, "and you ought to see the twerps they have as agents at those big places. They look like insurance adjusters and they don't even smoke."

I walked up the long hot dark stairway to the second floor and turned right. The gold leaf was mostly chipped away on the door marked Sidney J. Fortune. I heard a television set droning on the other side and I smelled Sid's omnipresent Te-Amo cigar, so I knocked. "Door's open unless you want me to pay up on my American Express!" he hollered.

The first thing he did when he saw me was make fun of my clothes. "I ain't seen nothin' like that since 'seventy-one. The only place you see that much baby-blue any more is out in the country on a spring day, and then you gotta look up. A guy shouldn't go around lookin' like the sky, Hock baby. Maybe God don't like that so much, y'know?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then he gave me one of his cigars and lit it for me with a Zippo that leaked. I settled back in a cracked Naugahyde chair and told him how I was on decoy that day and all. Then I told him about Julie Todd's murder and he listened closely.

"She really got to you, huh?"

"To me she was a classic. Like Garbo."

"Garbo! Listen, you seen Garbo lately? She just turned eighty and she goes everywhere around town in one of them knit caps like guys up in Canada wear when they go ice fishin'. I tell you, Hock, it's an ugly new age. Last time I saw Garbo, she was havin' coffee and a sinker at some dive over on Second Avenue next to the dog pound."

I changed the subject—so I thought. "What are you watching on the tube, Sid?"

"Talk about your ugly new age. I was watchin' this thing called *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. It's hosted by some guy with the world's most annoying Australian accent—and take a wild guess who he just had on?"

I gave up.

"The curator of the Vatican art museum. The museum where the Pope lives! I mean, everybody's in show biz these days. I thought it was bad enough with the White House—but now the Vatican! See what I mean?"

No, I didn't quite see.

"Well, time was when there were lots of guys like Sidney Fortune you see sittin' here in front of you. We performed what you might say was a public service. Yeah, a real public service. By that I mean we were a barrier between the poor downtrodden audience and every harebrain from Nowheresville who thinks he's got what it takes to make it here in the Apple. I tell you, any act that got by the likes of me, *that* was entertainment!

"I used to tell some babe, fr'instance, 'I can make you a star, kid,' and lots of times I even meant it. Shoot, nowadays everybody thinks they're stars right off the bat because they were on the tube once maybe, or knew somebody who was. I don't know where it's going to end, I'm tellin' you." He slid the cigar from his lips and spat out some loose tobacco. "Wanna know the most ironical part of it?"

Yes, I did.

"The stars we got these days haven't got anything to do with guys like Sidney J. Fortune, which is somethin' you can look at two diff'rent ways—good and bad. *Bad* 'cause we got so many in the business like that so-called actress on *Dallas*—what's her name?—a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

skinny, no-talent dame who never woulda got past me to any audience anywhere. *Good* 'cause maybe I woulda made a mistake over a real artist like, say, DeNiro.

"There's a laugh. Y'know where Robert DeNiro lives? In a ratty loft down on East Houston Street is where, in a place that makes this here dump look like somethin' that hotel babe Leona Helmsley would grin about all over the magazines. You think that's how a *star* lives? Of course not. Nobody else does, neither.

"Confusin', ain't it? People got it all mixed up now about art and artifice, which used to be an art in my day. People in the business are confused, too. Youngsters mainly, but some who ain't so young any more.

"The terrible part is everybody's in on the act. Everybody thinks they got what it takes, which is because it don't take so much any more. Just watch TV like I do and you'll see that. They just *say* they got it and everybody believes 'em."

I had to get back to work.

"Here's how this bunch stays afloat," Sid said. He spread open the latest issue of *Backstage* and pointed to the display ads. "There was a time when most of the ads in the trades was for parts. Nowadays most of the ads are for acting lessons and voice lessons and dance lessons, and cosmetics coaching and résumé preparation and eight-by-ten glossies, which we used to call 'sugar snaps.' Get my point?"

I didn't.

"Hell, the point is a good part of the money in show business in this town today comes from people makin' it off each other instead of off the stage. So what happens to the hopes and dreams we had in my day?

"That's why I'm tellin' you, it's ugly. Somethin's gotta give when you go and run over delicate dreams by makin' hope so cheap."

I picked up the *Backstage* and looked through it page by page until I came across exactly what I was afraid I'd find. Then I asked Sid if he'd be kind enough to check up on a few things Julie Todd had said about herself and left his office on a dead run.

I got her address easily enough and it traced to a scabby residential hotel full of half crazy, used-up working women over on Eleventh Avenue near where the city is tearing up everything in sight to make way for a convention center that will bring even more tourists to Manhattan. I woke an ancient crone who was the desk clerk of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the place, showed her my I.D., and had her open up the room I was interested in.

She was gone, of course. "Smells like lavender in here," the desk clerk croaked. I saw why. The drawers all had sachets in them and were otherwise empty and left standing open, like she'd been in a big hurry to slip away.

There was a bed. It was a steel-spring number with a thin mattress, junior twin-sized to guarantee loneliness. It was heaped with the things she didn't want any more, parts of her life thrown away. Included among this detritus was the murder weapon, so I came to learn. I came across a photograph. It was of her and she'd marked the year 1949, month of November, around the crinkled white border in blue fountain-pen ink. She wore a studio page's uniform with a pleated skirt and a big smile. Milton Berle had his arm around her shoulder. She'd written below this, "My first role, ha ha!"

"Did she have any family anyone might know about?" I asked the desk clerk.

"Out of town, but I forget whereabouts." The desk clerk said this so slowly and deliberately I knew she was telling me the truth and that giving her ten dollars of the city's money for elaboration would be wasteful. "She didn't have nobody here in New York, I know that much. None of us here do no more, it seems. What'd she do anyways, officer?"

I ignored this. "Do you happen to know if she had any money to speak of? Any bank accounts?"

"You kiddin' me? With all it takes to pay thievin' doctors when you're an old biddy all by y'self?"

So there I was, at the end of a short trail. It's amazing, really, how very portable our lives can be. Even the biggest household can be packed up inside a truck and rolled off into the sunset. Lots can accomplish a vanishing act with the help of a couple of suitcases and a bus ticket. And those who are poor, alone, unattractive, and without friends can move with a special suddenness, and it will be a long time before we're missed.

It's been my experience that some of this sort make a final, common stop before leaving New York and its fables—the Times Square branch of Western Union, where they wait for money to be wired to them from towns they swore they'd never see again.

That's where I caught up with her that late summer afternoon, after a quick phone call to Sid, in the airless black-and-grey Western

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Union office at Broadway and Fortieth Street, waiting on a long line of rumpled people talking like the last thing they needed in the world was financial help from home. Most on line had nervous friends along, forcing the laughs and mighty anxious to be blown to drinks and a meal, which maybe they hadn't had in a while. The tellers behind the bulletproof window cages counted out the money as slow as humanly possible and rolled their eyes when the only thing someone could show in the way of personal identification was a card from a walk-in medical clinic or the New York Public Library or Actors Equity. Larceny wasn't the only reason those teller windows had to be bulletproof.

Outside, I had an unmarked car idling at the curb and a couple of blue-and-whites nearby. I also had four uniforms hanging around for backup, but I knew that wouldn't be necessary. The detectives from the Ninth Precinct were on their way, so I'd be going to the mats with them pretty soon about who got the collar for the record.

She just stood on line all by herself with two elderly Samsonite grips on the floor in front of her. When I tapped her on the shoulder, she acted like she figured on bumping into me. I saw the air sort of go out of her and took my hand off the .44 tucked under the armhole of the leisure suit I planned on burning later. She was in a daze, somewhere far away from me and everybody else. She'd even forgotten to take off her hair net.

"I suppose you had your reasons?" I said to her.

She looked at the floor and then raised her head melodramatically like she had that morning when I nearly laughed at her. "She tricked me."

"You mean she wasn't who she said she was?"

"If you mean she wasn't no workin' actress like she claimed, yeah, that's what I mean. She tricked me, just like all the rest. I checked up on her."

"Yeah, so did I. A friend of mine found out she never did that Broadway show like she said, never did any parts in any movies anywhere, and never even did any television. She wasn't a member of any of the unions."

"So what business did she have conductin' them classes with me up to her place, huh?"

"None at all."

"It wasn't just me she took money from. You see her ad in *Backstage?*"

"I saw it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Lies! All them credits she listed was nothin' but lies, right?"

"Yes, they were. People have to live, though, and she wasn't the only one in the world who's lied to do it."

"You have any idea how humiliatin' it is for an old nobody like me to be fooled like that? I shoulda seen that one. I shouldn't of fell for it, not after all I fell for in my life. Can you imagine?"

"I can imagine."

She folded her arms and we stood looking at each other for a minute.

"I forgot to give you the Miranda," I said.

"Yeah, I used to forget my lines all the time, too. It's okay. Anybody asks, I'll tell 'em you did it right off. I was only goin' home after a long time away and now that I think about it a nice prison cell upstate someplace is a better prospect than that."

"Did you use the apron strings on her?"

She looked down at the floor again. "Yeah, that's how I done it and it didn't take long. Maybe you won't believe it, but I was sort of killin' myself.

"She looked kind of like me for a minute, sittin' there in that divan I liked so much and tellin' me about how she liked you. I already knew she was a fake, 'cause I'd checked up that day, and I couldn't help thinkin' how unfair it was that she had what she had. I mean, she's got this decent place to have a nice man come by and they can have somethin' to drink and just gas away a night. I never had that in all the years I spent hopin' for somethin' to come my way in the theater, y'know?

"Even so, I couldn't help but like her. I wanted to put her out of the misery that was sure to come to her. So I done it. I walked around behind her and she never knew what hit her.

"Yeah, I was mad at her—crazy mad—but honest to God, Hock, the other part of it was that she was such a sweet-lookin' young thing I just wanted to spare her the misery I knew she had comin'. I know that's sorta insane, but I think I'll just plead guilty and save myself from havin' to hope any more."

I took her by the elbow and gently steered her to the door, where a couple of young officers in uniform took over. They cuffed her because it's regulation for homicide collars and put her in the cruiser.

It was then that I noticed how the Western Union office was hushed, how everyone had stopped to watch the strange drama Sonja played out for them.

She smiled at me from the back seat of the car. And from where

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I stood, she looked like she did in that old photograph she'd left behind for good in her sad little hotel room.

For a second or two before the car pulled away, she did look a little like Julie Todd. Despite her words, hopelessly hopeful as Uncle Liam would have described her.

There was one thing Julie had told the truth about. She really had won a part in that measly play. It would have been her first role and maybe she would have had somebody take a snapshot like Sonja had back in '49. And maybe that's as far as it would have gone for her, too. Go figure show business.

DETECTIVERSE

MATRIMONY, ACRIMONY

by FRANK DENTON

Will it be the pistol or will it be the knife?
What instrument of murder to end her whining life?

How to be unique? Perhaps I'll use a rope
Or some new and expensive illegal kind of dope.

I'm weary of her screaming of the thirty years she's given—
It's me who should forgive and not be the forgiven.

She could have found another way to show her discontent.
I'll kill her just as soon as I get out of this cement.

© *1986 by Frank Denton.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

QUENCH YOUR THIRST FOR MYSTERY

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO 24% OFF THE COVER PRICE

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-247-2160

(Iowa residents Call 1-800-362-2860)

YES SEND ME 12 ISSUES FOR ONLY $15.97

ELLERY QUEEN THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

P.O. Box 1930, Marion, OH 43306

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions $19.97 for 12 issues. All foreign orders must be paid in advance in U.S. currency.

DQG6Q

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

From New York City to San Francisco and another scenario for murder. Actually, quite a few scenarios.

"You speak of the press," Paul Taggert said. "I thought you were in good with them."

"I am," Muldoon told him, "but did you ever see a documentary of sharks in a feeding frenzy? Throw them Carter's body and they won't be able to control themselves—not when they smell hot blood . . ."

ANOTHER DEAD NOBODY

by ROBERT TWOHY

Paul Taggert calls and tells me a man's on his wife's bed, clothes on, the gold-handled letter-opener from her desk jammed into his throat. There's blood all over his shirt, jacket, the bedcover, and the rug between the bed and the door.

"You sure he's dead?"

"My God, yes! It's in all the way to the handle!"

Paul knows the guy—he's a gardener worked for him briefly about six months ago. The garden started looking bad and Paul canned him. His name's Boyd Carter, well built, about thirty-five, brown hair, wide blue eyes now fixed on the ceiling. He had a moustache then but not now. Paul's sure it's him.

I've called Yellow. They said half an hour. I said to have the guy tap the horn twice. I'm sitting at the window over Fulton Street northside of the park and can look down three floors by standing up. I'm dressed and smoking a Pall Mall and thinking how when everything's going good is when to expect bad news, but I never seem to be ready.

© *1986 by Robert Twohy.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paul's wife Caroline's not home, he said. He put his Pontiac in the garage and her Mercedes wasn't there. So she stabbed her lover, Boyd Carter, as he arrived or was leaving and he fell on the bed—then she took off.

That's one scenario. Another is that she and Carter were so lost in passion they forgot it was Friday, which is when Paul drives home after campaigning all week in the City, where he stays at his condo. He caught them in bed and stabbed Carter, and maybe her, too. Then he got them out of bed and dressed Carter, changed the sheets, made the bed, put the cover on, and laid Carter out on it, lugged her body downstairs, got it in the Mercedes, drove up to Skyline and dumped her in some gully, hid the car somewhere, and hoofed back.

Here's another. Carter's not her lover. She wakes up to see an intruder looming over her in the dark. She skins out of bed, grabs up the letter-opener and shoves it in his neck, he falls on the bed, she panics and takes off.

Paul wanted to call Al Winert, his lawyer friend, but I persuaded him not to—Winert's advice would be to right away notify the law. I may tell him the same—but first I want to find out things, see if there's a better way to go.

I get up and look down. Fulton is dark and nothing's moving early this Saturday A.M. late in October.

Ten days till election. I've been working for Paul since July, when he hired me to do something about his dead-in-the-water campaign. He knew I know P.R., my trade for twenty years, so he put himself in my hands. He had plenty going for him—good looks, nice smile, good strong voice, wavy white hair—plus a ton of money and an old San Francisco name. His great-grandfather founded Taggert Tool Co. in a shed on Brannan Street in 1879—still the same address, though taking up eight blocks now. But Paul wasn't getting through to the voters.

I got him a style coach and the guy taught him how to open up, reach out to the voters, let them know he treasured them and needed them. He taught him the somewhat breezy approach San Francisco voters go for, good humor with a slice of wry, compassion but don't con me, baby, I've been around. Paul took to it and it worked, the voters responded, we began to move.

When I took over, he was running sixth of seven. Yesterday's *Chronicle* poll has us third, 22 percent to 29 and 26 for the two front-runners, Griscomb and Haley, the rest of the field way downtrack.

Just off the pace is best at this stage. The two leaders are scourging

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

each other while Paul lopes along with a grin and a quip and his fine hair blowing in the Bay breezes, giving off the apple-cidery aroma of a winner. Tuesday, November 6, we'll be in front by a neck—or that's what I thought until half an hour ago when the phone rang.

I fire up again. That's three since I hung up. My watch shows just past two. Strange how time stands still when you're waiting for a Yellow to take you down the Peninsula to look at a corpse.

When I went to meet Caroline Taggert, I didn't know whether to feature her in the campaign—I saw points for and against. She's early thirties, Paul is a healthy sixty, and she's twice divorced. Paul was married to the same lady for twenty-five years, until her death six years ago. Four years ago, he went up to Reno and lost his money and his heart to the pretty blonde blackjack dealeress who was Caroline Taylor, between husbands at the time. A week later he brought her home as his bride.

So she has a lively past, which for San Francisco voters isn't all bad, and she's small, trim, and bright. On the other side is the fact that Paul is super-rich, with no heirs, two teenage kids having died in an accident, so voters might get the notion that Caroline married him not for his charm and virility but strictly for cash. Which might make them wonder if he's kind of a pigeon, maybe not so sharp upstairs, after all. So I've given her a restrained role in the campaign. She makes a few appearances with him, smiling and not saying anything, and takes no part in the day-to-day grind in the City. Reporters have mentioned her background but don't pound it. I get on well with them, as you'd better in P.R., and they're not out to axe me or Paul.

Blip-blip! I poke my head out and there's the top of the Yellow. In three seconds I'm trotting down the hall and fifteen more I'm sliding in by the driver and telling him to take me to Lindenvale Hills, please, the firehouse on Skyline.

Which is three-quarters of a mile from the Taggert estate. I'll hoof it. I don't want to give Paul's address or any indication that something's going on there at 2:10 this A.M., ten days before the election—not until I see how we stand. If there's any way to put a lid on this for ten days, I'll put a lid on it.

The driver is lean and laconic, a hard-core City nighthawk. I ask if he'd mind if I smoke. He shrugs, says not if I crack a window. I slap my pockets and contact no bulge, ask if he can spare a smoke. He says smugly that he's quit.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I can tough it until I get to Paul's, but then what? He's not a smoker and I don't know about Caroline, but she's not home anyway—she might be lying in a gully.

We're through the park and heading out Nineteenth, which just past the college jogs over to Serra Boulevard, running south to Peninsula points. "There's a Doggy Diner along here, isn't there?"

"Used to be, but no more." He speaks like an authority on all facets of the City. "You want a doggy or cigarettes?" Cigarettes. "Only place this hour is the all-night super on El Camino in San Bruno."

El Camino is a mile east, meaning time and money on the meter which is chugging away twenty cents a chug. But whoever named it addiction picked the right word. "Let's go there."

We travel three miles south, then swoop east on Sneath Lane, with the vast National Cemetery to our left occupying all the acreage down to El Camino. Three minutes later, I hustle into the market and procure two packs of the necessary. Back in the cab, I crack the window, flare up, and we're off, meter showing $15.40. We go a few miles south with me gazing blankly, until something jolts me in the eye. "Pull in here!"

We're alongside a shopping center, at the south edge of San Bruno. He wheels in. I'm peering at a huddle of cars at the inside corner of the big lot near a bar sign, OASIS, unlit, and a lighted window across which is lettered MARY'S JOY DONUTS.

I tell him to put me on time, that I'll be a few minutes. I don't know what I'm going to do, if anything. What I've spotted may be irrelevant, the mid-Peninsula having more than its share of quality imports. But Caroline's not home, and parked less than ten miles from her place is a silver-grey Mercedes just like the one I saw in front of the garage the time I was there.

The guy comments that about now he'd like to hold some green. I lay two tens on him, slide out, and saunter toward Mary's.

Through the big window, I take in a few couples at tables, a guy or two at the counter. I hone in on the couples, and half of one of them is a small blonde in a dark skirt and jacket. The man with her is youngish and bulky, grey suit and red-brown hair. I stand wondering if I'm looking at a killer—a rival swain, maybe, who arrived at the chateau for a bout of love and found he'd been pre-empted. Could there have been a fight, ending with this one ramming the letter-opener into Carter's throat? Possible. He and Caroline could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be here to pour warm coffee on frayed nerves while plotting how to dispose of the body, not knowing it's been discovered.

Though short on facts, I can grind out scenarios. But one fact I now know that I didn't is that Caroline isn't moldering in some gully and I have only one body to worry about—so far, anyway. I glance toward the cab and wave to indicate I'm on top of the situation—not true—and stride into the clean and well lit place.

Amble to their table and with a murmur drop into a chair opposite her with him on my right.

She shoots me a puzzled glance from silver-lidded green eyes. She's hiding that she recognizes me but not quite. "Do I know you?"

"I work for your husband."

"Husband." Up close the guy's bulk is flab, not muscle, and the young hair doesn't suit his face, which has pouches and veins. He's fifty trying for thirty-nine and no takers here, he needs low-watt barroom light.

He mutters, "You married?" I notice her ring hand sports a flashy silver-and-blue number, not the elegantly simple band of gold I'd seen at our previous get-together.

She flips disdainful fingertips my way. "This person is totally unknown to me."

I put on a somewhat sly smile and murmur, "He asked me to find you."

The guy licks his lips. "I just met this lady. In the bar next door. I bought her a drink and we had light conversation. Now we're having coffee."

"I noticed. Yours is black with sugar." Like that might go into an affidavit.

"My car's out there—'eighty-one Chev, the light-blue one. So you can see we're not together, there's no involvement at all."

He drops two bucks on the table and starts out, hooking a hip on the point of the next table. He staggers a little, gets his footing, and slides into the night.

Caroline narrows the silvered eyes and gets a crooked smile. "So, Marlowe—following me, huh?"

"It's Muldoon. I was on my way to your place and saw your car."

"Want some coffee?"

"Where are you off to now?"

"Home, I guess. You did me a favor, Mr. Muldoon. He left his charm in the bar."

She looks cool and amused, not like a lady who recently finished

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

off a gardener. The guy I'd sent back to wife and reality hadn't stabbed him. But somebody had, and left him on her bed, with election ten days off.

I tell her I have to settle with my cab and go out, find I owe $18-plus. I tell him we're disaffiliating and to keep the entire twenty dollars, which doesn't thrill him. I hurry back, light up, swallow coffee, and, with only one other couple in the place at a far table, ask, "What about Boyd Carter?"

The puzzlement looks genuine this time. I can read her eyes better, she's swabbed off the silver and most of the gunk from her cheeks. "Who's he?"

I tell her what I know, commanding her full attention. When I finish, she says slowly, "You're not kidding, are you?"

"I'm telling you what Paul told me."

"He wouldn't kid." She frowns and fingers her chin. I notice the gold wedding ring is back, the blue-and-silver dazzler out of sight. "I remember a guy with a moustache working in the garden. I never knew him, or spoke to him."

"You didn't let him in tonight?" No. "Any servants?"

A day-maid and a part-time gardener. "I'm alone there at night."

"Every night?" I want some facts to work with, or against.

She says coldly, "Paul's gone all week and sometimes I need music, some laughs, company. All right, maybe I need to know I can still put a glint in a man's eyes. I'm getting older." So she is, so am I. Boyd Carter isn't. "Paul figures I'll get over this sex-kitten stuff and things will get good with us. I hope so. Unlike most marriages, which start on a high and go flat in a hurry."

I tell her I wouldn't know.

"Okay, but know this—I'd never do anything to mess up Paul's campaign. I put on makeup and go to different bars and I'm Virginia from Vegas and have I.D. to prove it. So to answer your sneaky question, no, I've never brought a guy home."

"And you didn't let Carter in tonight?"

"I didn't even know Carter."

"Is there a burglar-alarm system?"

"Sure. It's supposed to yang like crazy and connects with the police. I make sure everything's locked and set it when I go out."

"What time did you go out tonight?"

"About midnight."

"You didn't know Paul was on his way home?"

"No. Some weekends he stays in the City. He called Wednesday

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and said he wasn't sure. So at midnight I went out for some action. You deactivated me."

A few minutes later, we're tooling south on El Camino. She drives fast but in good control after two or three coffees laid over her drinks at the Oasis. I believe her more than not. I've yet to meet a pretty woman who couldn't con me if that was her aim, but it made no sense that she'd kill a lover, then dress up and go to a drinkery in a nearby shopping center, pick up a guy there, and take him to a bright-lit coffee shop.

We pass the hospital and two minutes later she's turned right onto the hill. Four minutes more, she makes a sharp left and we slide down a wooded lane with five-hundred-thousand-dollar shanties either side, on land that had been the Taggert estate in the days when there were only six or eight castles on the hill, each surrounded by farmland, fields for horses and cattle, and a few hundred serfs toiling for a buck a day. Those were the great days of Bay Area baronialism. By standards of then, the Taggert fortune had been modest and so had the castle. In the years since, various wings had moldered and been chopped away, and now remaining was a semi-modernized two-story chateau of a dozen rooms or so. Only twenty acres remained of the original six hundred, woodland mostly, with a big sweep of lawn and flowerbeds to the rear which had briefly been the responsibility of Boyd Carter, now reclining on milady's bed.

She pulls the Mercedes in front of the wide garage, space being clear as Paul's Pontiac is inside. We amble down a covered walk to the front door and she fiddles with a key ring, then scrapes it along her chin, and frowns. "I better ring. He might have the alarm on Instant."

I don't know what that means but it's low-priority among the batch of things I don't know. She pushes a button and in a few seconds a voice comes out a grilled slot. "Who?"

"Caroline, Paul."

"God! I didn't know where you were! Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. Muldoon's with me. He told me—what you told him on the phone."

"What's *he* doing with you?"

"Open the door, Paul."

It opens. He wears a green robe and a frazzled face, eyes round

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and patchy—he looks like his own aged uncle if he has one. He wheezes a sigh, grabs her hands. "I thought you'd been kidnaped!"

I ask him if he's called anyone.

"No."

So he hadn't worried too much that she'd been kidnaped. His likelier thought is that she'd killed Carter—unless *he* had. She tells him she went out for a few drinks. I tell him how I came on her scene, and that I'd told her the situation.

"Did you kill him, Caroline?"

"No, Paul—did you?"

"No."

That settled, I suggest we have a look at him.

We proceed upstairs. Paul opens the second door in the hall, behind which is a white-and-gold bedroom with a desk, chairs, bureau, closet, bedside phone on a stand, queen-size bed with a gold cover, and on it a man with dead blue eyes, a parchment face, blue shirt, black jacket, tan workpants, worn brown shoes, and a stylish gold handle projecting from his throat. As Paul had said, lots of blood everywhere.

"You're certain this is Boyd Carter?"

He's certain. Caroline says he's the man she remembers seeing working in the garden six months ago.

"Have you looked in his pockets?"

"For what?"

For anything, I say. I reach under the hips, paw around, and come up with a wallet. It holds a five-dollar bill and three ones, a few scraps with scribbled names and phone numbers, and a small stack of cards, the top one a California driver's license picturing the man on the bed, moustached and semi-handsome—Boyd V. Carter, Lynn Hotel, S.F., 36, 5′10″, 165, brown hair, blue eyes, no impairments, valid until birthday 1988. Birthday is June 14. He's a dead Gemini.

I lay the wallet on the bureau and ask Taggert to tell me about him.

He shrugs. "Someone recommended him, I guess, but I don't remember who. I hired him at ten dollars an hour two days a week—a waste of money. He was energetic but he didn't know what he was doing, so I canned him. He was here ten or twelve times. I paid him, gave him fifty dollars severance, and suggested he take up another line of work."

"You don't know where he was from?"

"No."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Or who his folks are?" My questions are to the point of whether, if he turns up missing, inquiries will be made, and if they might have some clout. A wayward gardener can be a dropout from a wealthy family.

Paul shakes his head. He might be lying, might know more about Carter than he's saying, but if he killed him I can't figure why he'd call me. Much likelier that he'd load the body into his car, dump it somewhere, and say nothing. Caroline as the killer doesn't add up, either.

I gaze at Boyd Carter, who gives me no answers.

Caroline is watching me. "What are you thinking?"

"Well, that maybe we should prowl around the house and see how he got in—that's granting that neither of you let him in."

"You think one of us did?"

"I'd like to think so."

Paul growls, "Are you being funny?"

"No. If one of you killed him, for some private reason, we could do something. As is—"

She says sharply, "As is, what?"

"As is, if it's neither of you, it could be a setup."

Paul sits down in a chair. "What are you talking about?"

"Politics. When it's more than just charm and baloney, politics is power. Voters might go for your smile and style, but the lads in the corridors of power aren't impressed. They're figuring which candidate will make the best mayor to play their money games behind—they may have decided you're not him."

Caroline hands me an aluminum ashtray she's got from somewhere. I carry it as I pace in a small circle on a non-bloody sector of the rug and hang out my new scenario for survey. "Put it that Carter, after he's canned by you, gets a job with somebody connected with a power group that may feel you're too rich and therefore not malleable. They want Griscomb or Haley, either. So they get Carter up here—"

Caroline says, flat-voiced, "How?"

"Some way. Break a window maybe—"

Paul grunts. "If they broke a window, it'd trigger the alarm at the police station." He shoots a glance at Caroline. "If you had it set."

"I had it set."

"It was off when I got home."

She sticks out her chin. "Then Carter turned it off, or the guys that killed him. I set it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I wave my Pall Mall. "How they got in, and got Carter in, is a detail for later. Right now I'm sketching the big picture." Caroline nods like she's impressed. If it's mockery I ignore it, caught up in my creation. "They get him here, kill him with the letter-opener, and put him on the bed, figuring that, one, Paul will call the cops, or, two, he'll try to get rid of the body. If one, the story's out: handsome young stud, former employee, slain in wife's bedroom—the electorate can work out the implications. If two—" I wave at the window "—a guy's hiding out there in the trees. We load the body in the car and drive off, he walkie-talkies some guys parked up on Skyline, they follow us, get photos of us dumping the body, feed the pics to the cops, the press, the TV stations."

Caroline says slowly, "Are you serious?"

"Maybe. If you didn't kill this guy, and Paul didn't, it could be just that, a setup—meaning we can't risk a dump job. So it looks like we're stuck with him. I think we're going to have to call the cops."

Paul mumbles some response but I don't get the words. I look and he's staring at the closet door. So is Caroline. I get it that the response must have come from behind it, not from Paul.

It opens and a small greyish guy in an old check shirt and grey pants with paint stains comes out, hands spread, palms front, and says in a mild voice, "I weigh one thirty-five and I'm sixty-one and if either of you guys or you, Mrs. Taggert, lays a finger on me I'll probably croak from fright—then you'll have two bodies to fret about."

Caroline looks like she has a sudden yen to sit. She does, on a clean space at the foot of the bed, moving Carter's near foot to do so.

The small guy pulls his front pockets out, turns around slapping his rear pockets, and picks up his pants to show he doesn't have a gun, knife, or bomb stuffed in his high shoes. He murmurs, "You been killing me with that cigarette." He pulls a pack of Kools from his shirt, fires up with a Bic, and gives a small groan of pleasure as he sucks in and blows out.

"Who are you?" I ask him.

"Kenneth Casey, from Petaluma. I came out because you're going to call the cops, which first thing they'll do is look in the closet. So I thought it was time I introduce myself." He gives us a thin smile.

Caroline points. "Is that blood on your shirt?"

He touches a dark place. "Still shows, huh? I gave it a quick

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sponge-off. You want to see blood, take a look at my jacket. It's rolled up in the closet."

Nobody takes him up. Paul asks, "Did you kill him?"

Casey looks at the dead man. "He's a cousin, kind of. He came to Petaluma, said he'd piled up his pickup—said he knew something could make us some bucks, we'd need my car. I said no way, none of his bright ideas ever came off. But he kept pushing. He said he knew the burglar-alarm control at a rich guy's house in Lindenvale Hills where he used to work, said the guy was running for mayor in the City—" he nods at Paul "—and there was just you and your wife, no live-in servants. The house was off by itself in trees, lots of valuable stuff. He said that one night when you were both out we'd bust the window far-side of the garage, the garage being not hooked into the alarm system."

Paul frowns. "True. But what good would getting into the garage do?"

"It got us next to the door in there that leads into the kitchen. Past that door, we're in the house."

"That door's in the alarm system."

"Boyd said it was. But he liked that door—he'd had a chance to study it, times when the garage was open. He said it was old-style, hinge pins on the garage side, easy to knock out. We'd bend it on the lock and he'd slide in behind it."

Caroline is leaning forward with her elbows on her knees and her chin on her knuckles. "I set the alarm."

"Boyd figured that. He said he'd have to move fast, the alarm would be on Delay. —I'm dropping ashes."

That hardly matters, the rug being the condition it is, but I pass him the ashtray. "How did he know about the alarm system?"

"He was in the house once, to fix something in your study." He's looking at Paul, who nods. "A shelf you asked him to fix. So he did, and you were busy at your desk. So he did a quick browse, figuring the alarm control would be somewhere between the front door and the door in from the garage. He found it in a cabinet under the kitchen sink. He'd worked for an alarm guy once and knew what to look for. He knew there was no switch outside or in the garage, so when you went out you'd push the Delay button, giving time on return usually fifteen seconds, he said—to get from the front door or the garage door to the control and to hit the Off button. That's what he told me. He was good at screwing things up, but it sounded pretty good, and I was tempted."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He pauses to carefully butt out his smoke. Caroline asks, "Where's Petaluma?" Before Nevada, she'd been a Valley girl.

"Eighty miles north, up 101. Last Tuesday we drove to Lindenvale and took a crummy motel. That night we drove up here and parked on Skyline at the Vista Point just north, where with glasses, if you stand by a particular tree he'd spotted, off the parking area, you get a clear shot of the house and driveway through the trees."

He turns his mild gaze to Paul. "We knew from the papers that you spent the week in the City campaigning. About nine o'clock we saw *you*—" Caroline "—put the silver car in the garage. So we knew you were in for the night, and we went back to the motel."

He slides another Kool between his lips. It dawns on me that I'm observing a rarity—a guy with a worse habit than me.

He's still looking at Caroline. "Wednesday about eleven P.M. you get in the car and drive away. Boyd wants to go down, but I get cold feet and we don't. Thursday you stayed in. We were about out of money and decided we'll have one more shot—so last night about eight we're at the Point and your car's in the drive, so we figure you may go out later. Time passes and I'm ready to chuck it, but he begs me—so I say okay, but if the lights go off in the house we'll go back to Petaluma.

"Then a little before midnight, you come out and take off and I drive down and around the house, take the service road around to the back. Boyd busts the garage window and we're in. We get the pins out of the door and he skins into the kitchen and takes care of the alarm. We unlock the door and get it back like it was so if either of you come home it'll look all right. He says if we hear a car coming I should beat it out the back door and he'll reset the alarm on Delay and hurry out, and we should have time to get away before you see anything's wrong."

Paul says, "The door looked all right but the lock stuck—I had trouble turning it."

Casey nods. "It's bent. You better get a lock guy out to fix it."

Paul nods that he will. Casey goes on. "So we're in the house and cop cars haven't come roaring up the drive and it seems Boyd's done okay for once."

He's quiet a few seconds, looking at his sort-of cousin. Then, "He says I should go upstairs and find the bedrooms and look for jewelry or cash or whatever looks worth taking and he'll poke around downstairs. So we split up, I come up here and go through the desk—"

Caroline says, "Sorry. I keep the jewelry in Paul's safe."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He says interestedly, "Where's that?"

Paul shakes his head. Casey grins slightly. "Right. —So I don't find anything in the desk and I'm thinking where I'll look next—the bureau I guess. I've picked up the letter-opener and I'm kind of flipping it, y'know. Really a nice piece of work—not lightweight, good solid feel, nice balance in your hand. I figure I'll take it along. It felt good hefting it. I take it by the point back over my shoulder and whang it at the door."

Caroline says softly, "Oh, no!"

He gives an odd, sad smile. "Oh, yes. Just as my hand starts forward I see the door open. I try to stop, but the blade slips through my fingers and I have a split-second look at Boyd in the doorway and the thing coming at him end-over-end, a mile a second, and a feeling it's got to hit on the handle or bounce off a rib or something. It doesn't. It goes *shloop*, right into his throat."

Caroline's hands are over her face and spurts of laughter leak through her fingers. Casey gazes at her neutrally.

Half a minute of that and she lowers her hands, shakes her head, murmurs, "Sorry. I'm not laughing that he's dead. But Muldoon just gave us a heavy political theory, how a bunch of power-brokers arranged the murder, and it turns out you whanged the letter-opener at the door because you liked the feel of it just as your hard-luck cousin opened it—" She blows out her cheeks, gets a helpless look, slaps her hands over her mouth, jumps up, and runs out, leaving a trail of yips and giggles.

Casey rubs out his latest Kool. "Anyway, that's how it happened." He smiles faintly. "Two nobodies, two losers. Runs in the family."

I ask, "Then what? You put him on the bed?"

"He took a couple of steps and fell. I caught him and got him to the bed. He made some noises in his neck, and I guess he died."

"Then what?"

"I guess some time passed."

Caroline comes in, under control, lips pressed together like they'd never leak out a yip or a giggle the rest of her life. She loosens them to say stiffly, "I'm very sorry, Mr. Casey. I regret your loss." Something starts to flare in the green eyes, but she casts them up at the ceiling and the flare fades, the eyes go appropriately blank. She takes the chair at the desk where she has no view of Boyd Carter.

Casey proceeds. "I take off my bloody jacket and roll it up. Then I go down the hall, find the bathroom, and wash up, dab my shirt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a little. I figure I'd better be going. Then I hear someone coming up the stairs. I grab my jacket and skin into the closet. I hear you—" Paul "—use the phone. Then you go out and you're pacing around in the hall. Then you come back and sit here a while. I was tired and sat down, and I guess went to sleep. When I woke up, I was ready to sneak out but I heard the doorbell and then you're all on the stairs."

He looks at me. "So, like you said—it seems time for the cops."

Maybe, maybe not. I want some basics. "He wasn't married?"

"No. Some girls along the way but nothing ever meant anything, to him or to them."

I find out that Carter had no kids as known, parents long gone, no siblings, no friends in particular—just Casey, his somewhat cousin, whose car is behind the house. The four of us are the only ones who know the story and nobody'll make inquiries.

I tell him to wait and motion to Paul and Caroline, who get up and follow me out. Next room is Paul's bedroom. I leave the door open and we sit. I put it to them that we can call the cops and give them Casey and the corpse or we can put a lid on the doings.

Paul says, "Why? He's confessed—Caroline and I are clear."

"Carter worked for you. Caroline is young, she has a past. He's not a bad-looking stud. Will the voters believe Casey? Or will they figure he's somebody you hired to take a manslaughter rap so Caroline won't be charged? That's the question—will they think Caroline and Carter were having an affair that blew up into murder? Which scenario do *you* think they'll go for?"

They don't say anything. I go on. "One thing is certain—the press will jump for it. They'll play up Caroline's Reno connections, affairs she might have had—"

Caroline grimaces. "Oh, God!"

"They'll make all they can out of it. They won't *say* there was an affair between you and Carter, but they'll dig up what dirt they can and serve it to the public—let them draw their own conclusion as to who killed Carter and why."

Caroline says, "You think it would hurt Paul's campaign?"

"It'd sink it."

Paul frowns. "You speak of the press—I thought you were in good with them."

"I am. But did you ever see a documentary of sharks in a feeding frenzy? Throw them Carter's body and they won't be able to control themselves—not when they smell hot blood."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caroline watches me. "So you propose what? That we get rid of him?" I nod. "How?"

"Casey and I will wrap him in an old sheet, put him in his car, and take him somewhere."

Paul rubs his face and his look is that he doesn't like this—but I don't hear him protesting.

Caroline narrows the bright eyes. "How about Casey? Wouldn't it make him a threat?"

"That he might talk later, you mean? I doubt it. If he does, he goes to prison. Manslaughter at least—homicide during the commission of a crime, or however the wording. Why should he put himself in danger of going to prison?" I look at Paul. "Give him some money, get him off the scene. Maybe he'd like to move to Florida."

Casey's mild voice sounds from the hall. "No way. I was there in the Army in 'forty-three. Got sick—too muggy."

He comes in, shaking off his Kool into the ashtray he's carrying. "So you want a cover-up." He cocks his grey gaze at me. "Pull out the letter-opener, wrap him in a sheet, you and me load him in my car, drive him to the City, dump him in the Tenderloin or Western Addition or some other high-crime area—why not? Just another dead nobody. Cops find too many of them to worry about it. So I don't go to prison, your campaign keeps rolling, everybody's happy—Except Boyd, but that wasn't your fault, you didn't invite us here, why should you get a hard time? No justice in that." He gives a small chuckle. "Isn't that what we all want—justice?"

Caroline is leaning forward, looking at him with her bright green eyes. "What do *you* want, Mr. Casey?"

He's quiet a few seconds. "I'll tell you what I *don't* want, Mrs. Taggert. I don't want to dump him on a lousy street like a piece of garbage."

Caroline gives a slight nod. I look at Paul. He's sitting still and I guess waiting to see how this is going to come out.

I say, "Okay, forget the Tenderloin. We can take him over to the coast, south of Half Moon somewhere, on the hill—"

"With trees around, songbirds, cool grass, an ocean view. I misjudged you, Mr. Muldoon," he says softly. "You have a kind heart, after all."

I reach for a Pall Mall. "Come on—I mean, you said it yourself. Why should we have to pay for your foolishness?"

He murmurs, "Why, indeed? Where's the justice in that?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And why should you go to prison? It's not like you killed him with malice."

"Of course not." He smiles. "I'm glad you believe my tale."

"Believe it?" Things seem to be tilting. "It's true, isn't it?" I hear an anxious lilt in my voice.

"Oh, certainly—yes, indeed. But I'd say that if I was lying, wouldn't I?"

I get the feeling he's taking me apart with no effort. I reach my cigarette to the ashtray he holds.

"You believe because you want to—it fits your purpose, which is to keep your campaign afloat. So dump Boyd. But I say no. I say call the cops."

Caroline says, "Do you want to go to prison, Mr. Casey?"

"No, Mrs. Taggert, I don't—but I can handle that. What I couldn't handle is the knowledge that I'd dumped Boyd."

He's quiet half a minute. We watch him. He says, "I'm a nobody. So was he. I'm sorry I killed him, but that was just my usual bad luck, and his.

"At first, and when I was in the closet, I'd have walked away from it. But I think I'd have changed my mind and called the cops. I think so. Maybe not. But I'm not going to dump him now."

Caroline says, "Who was he, Mr. Casey?"

"A Vietnam vet, who rates burial at National Cemetery." He turns his grey gaze to me. "He'll have a marker, him and about ten million other guys there—good guys, lousy guys, somebodies, nobodies—all kinds of guys lying there with one thing in common—they were vets, they served. He was a combat vet."

Paul gives a slow nod. Caroline closes her eyes and puts a hand over them and nods.

Casey looks at me. "You *could* kill me, then dump both of us in the Tenderloin. That pass through your mind?"

"Not seriously. I'm like you and him—not very good at crime."

I nod to Paul, who picks up the phone by the bed.

I was right about sharks. And the public.

Nobody believed Casey except the cops and the D.A.'s office. The public decided he was lying, which why not?—a few years in prison and then he'd be off to Ireland or wherever with the big money Paul paid him to take the fall.

Everybody was sure Carter had been Caroline's lover. Reporters dug up prime grime in Nevada—she'd had many swains, among

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them two Hollywood names, a millionaire quarterback, and a Mafia CEO. So it figured she'd have a passionate affair with the well built, semi-handsome gardener which continued after he was fired, ending when for whatever reason she jammed the letter-opener into his jugular. So Paul was doing what any rich husband would do, buying her out of the mess.

But he was dumb to hire an Irish baloney artist to spin a tale that couldn't be taken seriously. He should have done the obvious—dumped the body somewhere, the Tenderloin maybe. That way, no problems. But he hadn't—so he lacked smarts. Swinging San Francisco wants a mayor with smarts.

Casey went to Soledad for a five-year jolt for manslaughter—parole in three, probably. He's probably handling it okay.

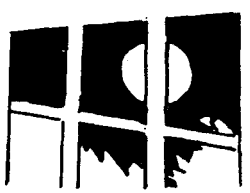
Griscomb beat Haley 33–30, Paul finishing with 14 percent for third. He had the door in the garage replaced and a new alarm system installed.

Caroline's getting older. Maybe she's less needing to see a glint in a man's eyes—or maybe she's more so. I wouldn't know, having moved on to other clients.

Today's *Chronicle* has a story of a guy found in the Tenderloin with his head bashed. Not much of a story—an inch or so on an inside page. There won't be a follow-up. He was a nobody, just street garbage.

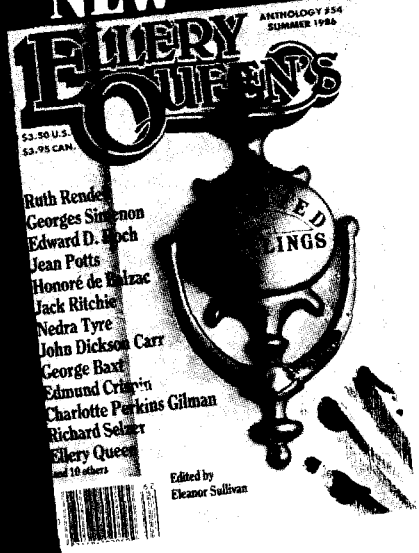
Boyd Carter has a plot in National Cemetery, with a marker.

Life goes on. So does death. So does P.R. So do I—smoking as much as ever, if not more.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW



from the editor of

ELLERY QUEEN

our latest anthology:

BLIGHTED DWELLINGS

A grim barn only a murderer can see... a rectory that chooses its own hauntings... a house that whispers ...each dwelling and the soul that inhabit it is blighted each in its own special way. 23 great tales from 23 past and current masters, 280 pages for just $4.50.

Mail to: Ellery Queen Anthologies, P.O. Box 999, Ridgefield, NJ 07657

☐ Please send me BLIGHTED DWELLINGS. Enclosed is my check or money order for $4.50.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

PLEASE ALLOW 6 TO 8 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY. AVAILABLE ONLY IN THE U.S. DQ541

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pat W. Murtha is the pseudonym of a teacher in the New York Public School System and "mother of two super adult children and grandmother of the most enchanting baby boy." Her first published fiction, which follows, is also super adult—and fascinating.

Recently a kind friend, obviously of a retiring nature (otherwise why send the scandal-rag clipping anonymously?), reminded Harry that Baba was a celebrity of sorts, in among Judge Crater and the rest . . .

THE MISSING BABA RYUN

by PAT W. MURTHA

Something's wrong with me. Phantom wounds and pain beyond feeling. I know I'm not an evil person, yet twice in recent years I've taken action or refrained from it, hoping for evil results.

If anyone guessed, they might not be surprised—not if they have long memories and a taste for gossip, speculation, rumor. People of a certain generation, my vintage. There are occasions when I walk into a room or change direction suddenly while threading through the crush at a party or happen upon acquaintances chatting in the street and sense a truncated conversation.

It might be: "Harry Ekstrum? His name rings a bell. Wasn't there something about his wife way back?"

My wife, way back. That's another thing wrong with me. My past has curiously little weight or substance. There were actions and reactions, no question. They affected me—nobody has better reason to credit their existence—yet, reviewing them, it's as if I'm a tentatively sketched, unsatisfactory character in a novel too obscure to merit credence.

Filling in forms, as we all must from time to time (born *here,*

© *1986 by Pat W. Murtha.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

educated *there*, service record *thus)*, my answers inspire me with mild wonder. It's hard to explain. But put it this way: I find it far easier to accept that parking meters first went into service in Oklahoma City the summer of 1935 than to have overpowering confidence in the details of my own previous life. The lineage of parking meters has more reality somehow.

I'm not crazy, hardly even eccentric. It's a matter of the difference between a prehistoric animal crashing across low ground, spattering silt with the mighty pistons of its limbs, and the muddy footprint bequeathed to us as a fossil in some museum case. Intellectually, one makes the connection and accepts the autograph, but does one quite believe in a living creature? Similarly, the young man gazing out of his college yearbook and Army snapshots must be me. My sense of recognition is formal, resigned. He is a citizen of the Old Country, left behind in my emigration across decades. I haven't the faintest notion who he is any more.

Baba Ryun took so many things from me. Baba Ryun! Eventually Barbara Grace Ryun Ekstrum. After our first meeting, I walked block after block across Midtown, well past my apartment, mouthing her rakish, magical name like an incantation.

It might be helpful to supply a frame and context. I was introduced to her at a Village party in the early 1950s, soon after the end of the U.N. "police action" in Korea that had killed or maimed comrades exactly like a real war—and I was euphoric over surviving combat and surmounting fear and privation.

In other words, I was very young and fairly old, in layers like jumbled rock strata. Baba Ryun was special. They always are, the people we marry, but Baba . . . I was alive and unscathed and she'd given me her phone number. *Bliss was it then*, and so forth and so on.

According to your standpoint, I was an idealist or a prig—certainly a snob. Sex before marriage was defined as sex when available, but not with one's future wife. Our sort of people—which I knew myself and assumed Baba to be—waited for the honeymoon.

At one stage of that honeymoon, I committed the most awful, sophomoric poetry, a paen to Baba's "dancing eyes." That they did, and no wonder—she must have been fizzing with stifled laughter at a chump thinking himself pretty damn blessed in being allowed to watch her undress with the light on.

A few months ago, drunk on his cognac and my own self pity, I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blurted out to Nils—my father—that she'd taken everything. My father's no sentimentalist. "*You* took one hell of a lot off that woman," he corrected. "That's why we never got along while she was around. Being a cuckold was your own affair, but by God I bitterly resented any son of mine being too dumb to understand what was going on."

And suddenly, avoiding my eyes, he grumbled, "You ought to go back to Long Hat for the summer, open the Yellow House. I daresay the place is falling down. Don't make me sell it, Harrison."

Nils and my mother bought that place before I was born. It's still an island landmark as the Yellow House because that's the color they painted it in 1930. So my father was pleading rather than suggesting, and I love the man. It would be too brutal to tell him the truth—that if I were ever fool enough to foster another ambition, it would be to go to my grave without returning to the Yellow House.

Baba liked the place and hindsight explains why. In those days, living and working in Boston, even a weekend was hardly long enough to make a visit worthwhile. The only way to fly to Long Hat was by hiring a plane, with one ferry a day in each direction.

So it made sense for Baba to spend the whole summer. I had two weeks' vacation and generally managed a few long weekends. (Nils wanted me in the firm but I opted for independence, otherwise the vacation would have been longer.)

Nothing if not impudent, Baba assured me she wasn't lonely. One of the hardest things to contemplate is what the island locals made of us. During my stays, we'd encounter people who'd taught me to swim and fish, sold me ice-cream sodas or tennis gear, or helped around the Yellow House when I was growing up.

Recently a kind friend, obviously of a retiring nature (otherwise why send the scandal-rag clipping anonymously?) reminded me that Baba is a celebrity of sorts. In among Judge Crater and the rest, she earned just two fat paragraphs as the beautiful young wife who went walking at twilight ("radiant as a princess, glimmering like a moth in her white Dior gown") and was never seen again. There were implications of flying saucers, alien visitations, and perhaps freak magnetic fields causing an entry into the Fifth Dimension.

Even my tenuous grasp of the past assures me that is laughably tawdry nonsense. Baba had no Dior gown. As a matter of fact, she was nearly naked in a frilly, filmy garment. Whether she glimmered, only our Maker can say. I remember jagged silhouettes of pine trees, the moon's silver road across the sea, fireflies glittering. Which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

indicates full darkness instead of twilight, though that might have been another night. There were so many.

Making it a better mystery, naturally. Where and how could she have gone after dark without adequate clothing or any money or other possessions at all? (And Baba's closets held more outfits than the average Long Hat store—and she was notorious for keeping dangerously large amounts of cash in her purse and bureau.)

I'd gone to Long Hat, my first and last journey there by plane, directly after learning what Baba was doing, had been doing from the start of our marriage, and apparently intended to continue doing for as long as I was simpleton enough to condone it. The news was broken by a friend's wife.

"Harry," she said, "I know you and Baba and for sure I know my husband. You're the problem. Harry, my grandfather has this anecdote about World War One, how they trained army mules. First, they took a length of two-by-four and smacked the mule in the chops with it, hard. That was to attract the mule's attention."

I suppose I must have smiled uncertainly, looking down over her shoulder at the Boston Common, wondering what in the world she was doing in my office on a July morning. My friend's wife put the letters on my blotter and said, "These are the stick, I don't want them back. I don't want a divorce, either. What you and Baba want is your business. Just pry her off Donald and make her stay away."

The letters were awful—gleefully explicit, gloatingly and vulgarly sensual, full of gutter phrases. The worst of it was, looking at Baba's familiar writing, flowingly mannered, tiny circles instead of dots above the i's, set her voice reciting the obscenities in my head.

Baba's reaction was extraordinary. Not the least defensive—more incredulous indignation that I was making trouble. She believed, or very convincingly pretended to believe, that I'd known what was happening. And ludicrously, arriving as a wronged husband, I was within minutes protesting that yes, truly, I had been a complacent, trusting buffoon.

The row went on for hours, while Baba cooked food that neither of us ate, then showered, brushed her hair. I could sense that she regarded me as a hypocrite, that, consciously or not, her repeated, compulsive infidelities had excited me. It was such a monstrous theory that for much of the debate I was crippled, struggling.

Later we walked in the garden. Baba said, "Harrison Ekstrum, you're a strange one. You'll divorce me and that's fine. But you won't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

really want to. You haven't had a genuine emotion in your life, darling. You're like somebody from the wrong side of the tracks at their first dinner party. All that cutlery—you've got to wait and peek out of the corners of your eyes so you know which to pick up next." She laughed, breathless with anger. And she was crying a little, too. Perhaps, unwillingly, she was starting to understand the meaning of her way of life and its impact on me.

What she said may have had some truth but it enraged me because it meant she viewed me as an ant or a midge, part of a tribe, a society. Never as a man who loved her dearly, and lived for her.

Next morning she wasn't there, her bed had not been used. It frightened me. We'd said unforgivable things and Baba was headstrong. But embarrassment was even more powerful than fear. I'd grown up with Long Hat as my hometown for at least part of every year of my life and now I must go out among the neighbors and tradespeople and hired help of a lifetime, asking if I might have my wife back, please. It never occurred to me that she might have left the island, returned to Boston, or gone on to New York. Our car was missing, but a quarter hour walk to New Harbor confirmed that it was parked behind the Pirate Lugger.

Driving back to the house, I phoned everybody I knew. Two days later I went to Dub Ascott, the police chief, and reported Baba missing. For a while, when Nils was getting the Zurich office off the ground at the end of World War Two, Dub had been a proxy father. It was painful but not difficult to explain the problem.

"She's not really missing," I said miserably, "it's just that she might be somewhere where I have no right to go."

During the endless row, Baba had let slip the name of an artist who'd been at all her beach parties that summer. He was an Englishman who had rented a saltbox on the lagoon beyond New Harbor—I'd been there and he refused to open the door.

"I'll check it out," Dub Ascott promised. He gave me a straight look. "The Missus, Harry—Mr. Ekstrum—she leads sort of an active life while you're in the city. If she's holed up somewhere— What I'm saying, this may take time."

After a week I went back to Boston. Rather more than a month later, Chief Ascott called me to say he had referred the case to the State Police. The English painter was insisting on intensive investigation, hinting at probable foul play.

I was interviewed on a number of occasions. Some newspapers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

carried stories. Baba was reported to have been sighted at Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket aboard a sailboat, wearing a bikini. She was seen in Boston, Manhattan, and Washington, D.C. Whether or not these sightings were well founded, she has never come back.

I spoke there at the beginning of wrong actions. They lay in the future.

To labor the point, little or nothing of that period seems real to me. At best, there's a movie in my mind, skewing out of focus, soundtrack melting, when I attempt to study it. A tiny Harrison Ekstrum confronts a minuscule Baba Ryun Ekstrum, but they vanish in a flick. Her cutlery speech still catches me on the raw, yet its power is abstract somehow, like a disturbing speech from a play.

Nils and my mother assailed her as wicked, a shallow, squalid, insolent whore—and that offended me. Their diatribes grated, their abuse missed the point. Baba was what she was. In her terms I was lucky to sleep with her regularly. I badly wanted to forget.

From around 1960 until say 1975 I believed myself a burnt-out case, purged, beyond reach—I didn't hate Baba, all that remained was reproach at her destruction of what we might have shared.

Then I found myself in the West Indies on business, not for the first time. The hotel was small, shabby, efficient, they knew one there—all of which suited me. The manager was an Englishman, Claude Mainprice, a sly, faintly bogus, rather engaging rogue.

He made me understand that I hated Baba worse than ever—perhaps even for the first time.

Mainprice was waiting for me one evening when I got back from the proposed refinery site on the coast, with its deepwater anchorage. "There's a woman asking for you," he said.

My expression must have taken him aback because his eyes narrowed and he licked his upper lip, smiling nervously. "She's not here now, Mr. Ekstrum. I only meant— She's not even asking for you, not really."

"What the hell *do* you mean?"

He spread his hands. "There's this woman—mutton dressed as lamb? You know, skirt up to here, what you might call shopsoiled?" Breaking off, he lowered his voice. "Are you all right, Mr. E? Touch of the sun? You've gone quite green."

"Get on with it!"

"Sorry I started, it's just a bit of a joke," he responded sulkily. "She was hanging around here, at the bar, asking if we got any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yank, sorry, American guests. Reckoned she thought she'd seen a man she knew coming in here only she was on the jitney and he'd gone by the time she walked back. Right fairytale, she's just some old slag from the States, down on her luck and hoping to make a soft touch."

Of at least this incident I remember every nuance in unsparing clarity. The thread on Mainprice's fraying collar, the precise depth of his smirk. He divined my repulsion and turned spiteful. "She's not here now, generally comes tomorrow if you want to meet her."

I checked out within the hour and never went near that end of the island again. I *knew* that the woman was Baba and visions of her, destitute and ailing, were headily pleasurable enough to make me tremble. For months, there at the refinery site or back in Boston, I imagined her subjected to Mainprice's jeers, saw her warned away from the hotel, growing desperate, grubbier, lacking even the price of a shared slum bedroom. Dying. Dying on a garbage dump.

Shame, contrition, self-disgust came belatedly—in a Saturday-evening movie line, of all places. The refinery was built. I hadn't been out of the United States for a year or more. Suddenly I seemed to be standing beside myself: there was a man waiting to see mechanical fantasies, who had behaved abominably, being watched by another me, who was appalled.

It took a long time to recover, to come to terms with the concept that hatred for Baba was in my blood—a recurrent illness like malaria. But at least while wishing harm to another, it was unlikely to have occurred. That unknown woman, virtually certainly *not* Baba, hadn't died. She'd no doubt found a man or men, she might be anywhere. I wished her well.

The disease was in remission, that was all.

Its recurrence was worse, much worse. I was overseas again, based in a minor country which I will not identify since my company is heavily involved there, friends live there, and others will replace them. But it is a beastly place.

The capital is tolerable in parts, for those who can go blinkered and shut their nostrils to the psychic stench of poverty, envy, and rage. In an area of about a dozen city blocks, buildings are marble-clad, fountains play, and policemen keep their pistols holstered and their fists and batons to themselves. It is the place where the foreigners with hard currency are kept.

I was living at another small hotel, not cheap, not efficient —ad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

equate. I would rise at first light and take breakfast on the tiny terrace outside my second-floor room. It overlooked the street behind the hotel where, fortunately, a tall, massive masonry wall hid the wasteland beyond. Gaudy flowers spilt down the wall. Generally the street was hushed and near deserted—one could fancy that one sat at the edge of a long, narrow, roofless salon designed by an exotic architect.

By 8:00 A.M. Peter, my company driver, would slot the car into position below my window, wave, then lean against the hood, arms folded, straw hat tilted, not smoking his cigarette but letting it burn, a secular joss stick.

On the morning in question— This is agonizing, even testifying to that most secret tribunal of one, myself. I'll start again—

Two days before, I had seen Baba. She was standing outside American Express in the square when I came out of the Development Ministry annex: Not surprisingly, she was older, her hair a new shade of polished steel instead of straw. The stance gave her away. Until she moved, I'd hardly seen a woman nearer sixty than thirty but fighting it, bare arms slender but their backs flaccid. A handsome youth strode past and she swiveled on a needle heel, openly staring at him. I went hot and cold, I wanted to throw up, whimper, pray. Barbara Ryun Ekstrum.

The next thing I knew, a floor pressed cool and hard against the nape of my neck. I had blacked out and been carried back inside the building to recover. The porters picked my pockets, naturally, but left my Rolex. It was, after all, the annex of the Ministry of Development.

Forty-eight hours later, I was eating croissants and drinking black coffee, absently admiring the polish Peter had put on the car, when my heart turned over. A woman was walking toward the car, a moving toadstool from the circle of cartwheel hat visible from my eyrie, but the flirt of bleached-linen skirt was unmistakable. Peter glanced up and shook phantom drops of water from his fingertips. He called, in Spanish, "I'm dying with passion for her, boss."

By then she was at the front fender of the car, addressing Peter in a voice too soft to hear. He mumbled something back, shrugged in frustration, shouted up to me cheerfully, "She wants the market! If she wants to get there, she should start from here, hey? Market! I could make a fortune with what she's got to sell!"

From the set of the hat, the woman didn't understand what he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was saying. Staying out of sight, I called back, "Tell her to cut through the arch in the wall along there and keep straight ahead."

"That's Rat Town through there," he told me. The woman was getting impatient, one could tell from the movements of the hat, liquid light shifting on glazed black straw. The brim tilted as she looked up, following his line of sight, making me duck back again.

Peter was saying, "No, you shouldn't go in there." I had to gamble. Holding a napkin to my face, I stepped out into sunlight. "The Market's through that archway, lady. Five minutes, if that." Then, heart juddering, I fled back to the bedroom and threw myself down. She would follow my directions and by the time she realized where she had gone it would be too late. Because Rat Town was a place where the police did not patrol but invaded when necessary. A woman on her own, a foreign woman alone, a foreign woman with a purse, jewelry—

One didn't have to be there to see it. I lay with an arm across my eyes, watching, seeing Baba falter and attempt to turn back, but the predators would be surrounding her by then and she'd run, the cordon parting to let her through—*away* from the arch—and her lungs would burn and her vision would flicker and presently she'd fall.

The bedside phone kept nagging. Eventually I went to the bathroom, rinsed my face, combed my hair. I was tired.

When I went down to the lobby, she was there! She and her husband and Peter, who had stopped her passing through the arch. Only the husband had assumed Peter was molesting her and Peter wanted me to vouch for him, explain.

The woman wasn't Baba, though she was the one I had seen two days before. Her jaw was heavier, nose larger, eyes the wrong color. When she spoke, it was with a French accent. I was disappointed over the error. Not contrite at nearly sending her into peril. Simply disappointed by my mistake.

Now you will understand what is wrong with me. If only the past held more authority and power, then I might be able to stop seeking Baba. Or perhaps that is too lofty an aim. Surely, though, I might stop finding her in other women. For there is no Baba to find. How can there be when I throttled her and threw her body into the ebbing tide that night at the Yellow House all those insubstantial, unreal years ago?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

I've been fascinated with Rex Stout's mysteries for decades, and on one unforgettable occasion I met him and had a chance to chat briefly at a Mystery Writers of America awards banquet. His magnificent creations, Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, leap off the pages, and with Stout's death in 1975 we might have thought we'd had the last volume from his pen.

No so. *Death Times Three* (Bantam, $3.50) contains two Wolfe novelettes in first book appearances and a third which only appeared in a limited edition. In "Bitter End," proceedings begin with the unthinkable: Wolfe's palate is battered with liver pate laced with a dangerous contaminant. "Frame-Up for Murder" seems to force Wolfe into the role of murder alibi, to him equally unthinkable. And in "Assault on a Brownstone," Wolfe's client is murdered before she can consult him in the matter of counterfeit twenty-dollar bills. Sheer delight in character, interplay, and dialogue.

A notably fresh and inventive suspense tale is Arnold Grisman's *The Winning Streak* (St. Martin's, $15.95). Goldberg, once of the CIA, is a gambler with a golden arm: when the feeling comes on, and it comes on frequently, he wins and wins hugely. He's just rolled up $140,000 with dice in Las Vegas and collected a girl in the process. She's beautiful and scared, and after a night's exercise in bed, she disappears—with his winnings, and a small corner of his heart. More concerned with heart than winnings, he tries to track her down. The trail leads to millions of dollars and murder, and Goldberg has to call on old CIA colleagues for help. Goldberg is a rumpled, engaging hero.

Kay Nolte Smith won an Edgar for her first novel, *The Watcher*. Her fourth, *Elegy for a Soprano* (Villard, $14.95), is even better, a masterful and incisive character study. Vardis Wolf, operatic diva, keeps herself surrounded by worshipful admirers. One of them kills her. More than one of them confesses. Dinah Mitchell, widow of a policeman, has just discovered evidence that Vardis was her real mother. Dinah is driven to understand the circumstances of her birth and the enigma that was Vardis. Bit by bit, she peels away pieces of truth, coming closer to the real Vardis, to the ties that bound her "Wolfpack" together, to the naming of a killer.

Graveyard Plots is a richly diverse collection of short mystery tales by Bill Pronzini (St. Martin's, $14.95). The twenty-three stories range over the first eight years of Pronzini's writing career, from 1968 through 1975. Most were originally published in magazines (eleven in EQMM), and three are about his "Nameless Detective" from San Francisco. Detection, suspense, horror, even a touch of fan-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tasy—these are all here in excellent examples of the work of a solid and imaginative professional.

William Dougal has a new antagonist in his third appearance, *Our Father's Lies* by Andrew Taylor (Dodd Mead, $15.95). Richard Prentisse, historian, committed suicide. Daughter Celia doesn't believe it. Attending Richard's funeral is Major Dougal, father of the William of fond memory, whose previous adventures are not to be exposed overlong to the inspection of the law. William and the Major are drawn into the matter, finding ties to a WWI scandal, still mysteriously classified by the government, and one or two other deaths also not innocent. Amiably and effectively told, this story; very pleasing.

The latest of Martin Russell's bafflers is *A Domestic Affair* (Walker, $13.95). Here, divorced Colin Fletcher is deprived of the company of his children by his uncooperative ex-wife, Louise. He and his new lady hope to prove Louise's unworthiness and so hire a sleazy private eye to snoop about. The ex-wife has meanwhile also found a new friend—a rich one, it seems—through a newspaper notice. In the midst of all this intrigue, Louise vanishes. Fletcher is distraught, the police are interested but not helpful, and his lady friend pitches in heroically. Soon a disbelieving Fletcher is to learn what this is all about. Another inventive plot by this creative writer.

Michael Nicholson's *December Ultimatum* (Parkwest, $14.95) is troubling but captivating storytelling because it probes an all too possible fearsome future. What would the U.S. do if a fanatic Moslem, unwittingly the foil of Moscow, took over Middle Eastern territory without whose oil the U.S. could not survive, and announced he was cutting off supplies for at least a year? Would a hawkish President do more than rattle sabres? What would U.S. citizenry do when petroleum stopped flowing? What would Britain do with its North Sea oil? Brotherly love has no part in the answers to any of these questions.

Inspector Luke Thanet, an appealing and very human policeman, returns in Dorothy Simpson's *Last Seen Alive* (Scribners, $13.95). Alice Parnell left Sturrenden twenty years ago. Now she returns for her first visit to the city of her birth and within hours is strangled. She proves to be a widow of spotless character, much beloved. But not, clearly, by everyone. The roots of her murder, dimly beheld, hard for Thanet to interpret, lie in the tangle of relationships two decades earlier. This is quite a tidy puzzle, well worked out.

I had so many reprints to celebrate they wouldn't all fit in last issue's column. Here are more. From Carroll & Graf, Anthony Boucher's *The Case of the Baker Street Irregulars* ($3.95). From Dell, a trio of Robert Barnard's witty excursions, *Death and the Princess*, *Death in a Cold Climate*, and *The Case of the Missing Bronte* ($3.50 each). From Perennial, two early Nicholas Blake stories about Nigel Strangeways, *The Beast Must Die* and *Minute for Murder;* two by Desmond Bagley, *Flyaway* and *The*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Enemy; and a pair by Michael Gilbert, *The Crack in the Teacup* and *The Family Tomb* ($3.50 each). From International Polygonics, two 1930s tales by John Dickson Carr, *The Burning Court* and *Hag's Nook*, a pair by Margaret Millar, *Beyond This Point Are Monsters* and *The Cannibal Heart*, as well as Hake Talbot's ingenious *Rim of the Pit*, *Murder à la Stroganoff* by Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon, and *The Talking Sparrow Murders* by Darwin L. Teilhet ($4.95 each). And finally, from PaperJacks, *The Death-Cap Dancers* by Gladys Mitchell and *Epitaph for a Lobbyist* by R. B. Dominic ($2.95 each).

© *1986 by Allen J. Hubin.*

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

A would-be killer named Tim Malone
Lies moldering 'neath this simple stone.
A fickle fellow to the core,
Tim found his lovely wife a bore,
And wished instead to make his bride
The doxy he kept on the side.
So, mixing drinks one Happy Hour,
He laced his spouse's whiskey sour
With noxious poison so full of zip
'Twould kill her off with a single sip.
But then, confused by the cocktail's fizz,
He drank her drink and she drank his.

© *1986 by James Holding.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DETECTIVERSE

GREAT STUFF

by PATRICIA F. GRAVES

His love for crime fiction's
A harmless addiction
And not an affliction at all.
His extensive collection
Of expensive detection's
On bookshelves that line every wall.
In both hardbound and paper
Each shamus's caper
Brings joy to him time after time.
His delight so delirious
In matters mysterious
Makes him relish the scene of the crime.
Had he ever to weed them,
Not merely reread them,
Decisions he'd find very tough,
For he hasn't the heart
With a volume to part—
That's the plight of our mystery buff.

© *1986 by Patricia F. Graves.*

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an excerpt from *A Shock to the System* by

SIMON BRETT

Your editor is often asked at mystery-writing workshops about the viability of poison as a murder method. Reading Simon Brett's delightfully ironic novel from Scribners recently, A Shock to the System, *a chapter struck us as the perfect answer to the question. It also seemed to us a rare instance where an excerpt from a novel might stand on its own as an entertainment in EQMM. We have not and will not make a habit of publishing tantalizing extracts from books and hope you will approve of this one departure. And of course if this chapter (10) and the first line of the following chapter from* A Shock to the System *whets your appetite to read further, the book should be readily available at (or through) bookstores and libraries.*

Now meet Graham Marshall, law-abiding achiever, his wife Merrily (a former flower child), her mother Lilian (a former actress), her sister Charmian (a pop journalist), and their two children, Henry and Emma. Unhappy in his marriage, frustrated by money worries and his failure to receive an expected promotion at the office, Graham has unpremeditatedly killed an old man—a stranger—in a fit of rage. Then, murder being once done . . .

EASIER IN THE ABSTRACT

by SIMON BRETT

It was not until the weekend that he began to think seriously about the murder. The euphoria which followed his decision about Merrily's fate had begun to dissipate from inaction. Also, Lilian was staying again "because she's still so upset over Charmian." His

Copyright © Simon Brett 1984.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mother-in-law's presence was the reminder he needed of his intolerable situation.

And his money worries remained. A groveling letter to the bank had bought time, but not a solution. So many of the family's expenses were essentials paid by standing order that, though he made himself unpleasant to Merrily about housekeeping and to the children about their entertainments, he knew that their actual savings could only be nominal. No, he had to stop paying the mortgage. And there was only one way to do that.

Murder, however, is easier in the abstract than it is in reality. Though the lack of repercussion from the old man's death gave him an occasional glow of unassailable immunity, Graham did not delude himself that Merrily's would be as easily achieved. For a start, it had to look like an accident. And, since he knew that the first port of call for every murder-investigating detective was the partner of the victim, it had to be accomplished in a way that absolved him from all suspicion.

The more he thought about the problem, the more his respect for successful murderers increased.

He quickly rejected the devices recollected from his occasional reading of detective fiction. Stabbing with icicles, bludgeoning with deep-frozen chops, injecting air bubbles into the bloodstream, and employing Pigmies with blowpipes all seemed likely to raise more problems than they would solve.

Poison, though . . . Poison did have possibilities. Not for nothing was it one of the favorites of the domestic murderer. Everyone ate and drank and, without resorting to the fictional hope of a poison unknown to medical science, there were an adequate number of lethal compounds around most houses.

Some research was needed. Graham went to the local library.

The girl behind the counter did give him a slightly odd look when he asked what they had on poisons, but directed him, without much confidence, to the Science section. Failing that, Health or Handicrafts. Or she had a feeling there was something on famous murderers in Biography. Or, of course, there was the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in Reference.

Graham hummed cheerily to himself as he set out along the stacks.

Science proved unavailing. He fell eagerly on the chemistry textbooks that were there, but they only glanced incidentally on poisons. Still, they did at least remind him of the little chemistry he had done at school. Maybe all those boring practicals hadn't been wasted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maybe they'd had some use other than getting him an O-level. Might be worth checking through his old notes when he got home.

Health was also, perhaps predictably, unhelpful. There were plenty of references to poisons, but all concentrated on how to cure someone who had taken them. Which was the last thing Graham wanted to know.

Handicrafts, he decided, had just been an optimistic guess on the part of the librarian.

Biography looked too dauntingly large a section for him to go through, so he went over to Reference and took down the volume of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which covered Poisons.

He sat down at a table and, amidst pensioners going through the newspaper racecards, mothers planning holidays with hotel guides, and schoolchildren working on "projects," he tried to find out how to murder his wife.

He stayed there for about an hour, rising periodically to fetch a new volume for a cross-reference, but at the end felt little further advanced. The editors of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* did not appear to have had the would-be poisoner in mind when they compiled their great work.

Graham found out a good deal about the triumvirate of arsenic, cyanide, and strychnine, but no clue as to how they might be unobtrusively obtained. Did rat poisons still contain arsenic? And if they did, how did one set about extracting it? Or feeding it to the victim? It didn't seem the ideal solution. And he didn't feel any more optimistic about building up a supply of cyanide from almonds or apricot kernels.

At the end of the hour, the only hopeful fact he knew was that poisons were much used as weed killers and insecticides.

Graham Marshall set off for the garden center.

There, too, there was a Saturday-morning crowd, of husbands with worried expressions and steel tape-measures estimating paving stones, of pensioners carefully stocking window-boxes, and wives loading Volvos with dahlia tubers and garden furniture. Graham again felt light-hearted, even light-headed, as he walked between greenhouses and Gro-bags to the covered part of the garden center. He felt a gleeful immunity from suspicion, just another commuter bent on titivating his rectangle of urban soil. His intentions were deliciously private.

As he went through the glass doors, a word came to him. A word

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he should have thought of earlier, a word whose dangers had recently received considerable press coverage.

Paraquat.

There seemed to have been a little spate of cases of children dying from accidental consumption of paraquat. Most of these had occurred on farms where the concentrated form of the poison was to hand, but Graham felt sure that a gardening version was available.

He also felt it was the ideal treatment for Merrily.

He looked along the rows of proprietary weed killers, but none was labeled "Paraquat." Obviously an ingredient rather than a brand-name. He started taking down bottles and cans to check their contents.

"Can I help you, sir?"

The assistant was young, with transparent down as yet unshaven over a spotty face. The green overall he wore was too large, suggesting that he was weekend staff, perhaps even still at school.

"Yes. I'm looking for something with paraquat in it."

"Oh, yes, sir. Why? What exactly did you want to kill?"

Graham looked up sharply, but of course there was no suspicion in the boy's eyes. It was a logical question to ask of someone selecting weed killers.

"Well, er, weeds," he replied feebly.

"Yes. Any particular sort, sir?"

Graham searched quickly through his memory and managed to come up with, "Ground elder."

"Oh, well, sir, I think you'll find this very good." The boy displayed a small bottle between finger and thumb.

"Does that contain paraquat?"

"No, sir. Glyphosate, sir." If he was still a schoolboy, the young man certainly seemed to know his business.

"Oh, thank you."

"That is the best, sir." The boy hovered. "The checkout's over there, sir."

"Yes. Yes. I'll—thank you. A few other things and—"

At last the boy wandered off and Graham resumed his study of the shelves. He felt disappointed. He had taken a fancy to the word "paraquat"; "glyphosate" had not quite the same ring. Anyway, his eroded recollections of chemistry could not provide a precise definition of "glyphosate" or its likely effects on Merrily.

Then his eye lighted on something else. It was the word he was looking for. "Contains paraquat," it said on the packet. He picked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a middle-sized box and read the cautions on the side. Yes, that sounded suitably dangerous. He was about to go, then changed his mind and took a large box instead.

Four pounds twenty. A bargain, if it did what he wanted it to do.

Jauntily, he walked up to the checkout.

"Not much good for ground elder, sir."

The omniscient youth had appeared round the corner of a garden gnome display.

"You want something more selective," he continued. "What you got there'll kill everything."

"Oh, don't worry," said Graham on a bubble of laughter. "That'll do."

If his resolve had been slackening (which it wasn't), Saturday lunch would have tightened it up again. The children were at their most repugnant, cross at being refused money to go to the cinema that afternoon. Lilian had molded her face into an expression of brave anguish and kept asserting how sharper than the serpent's tooth it was to have an ungrateful child. And Merrily, still basking in the fact that she was not the child in question, was at her most infuriating. She had taken to playing a brave-little-woman role. Yes, they were hard up, but she wasn't going to be daunted by that. She'd fight back. Maybe she could make a large batch of chutneys and sell them. Perhaps a little stall outside the front gate . . . ?

Graham might have minded less if he had thought his wife really meant it, if these suggestions were genuine attempts to improve the family finances. But he knew they were made only for effect, obscure flanking movements in a campaign directed at him. He noticed she never mentioned actually getting a job. On the one occasion when he had suggested it, Merrily had gone all frail and exploited, saying yes, of course, if he really wanted it, he could "send her out to work." She was sure she could somehow manage to fulfill what she still regarded as her primary duty of "giving him a good life." And she was sure that Henry and Emma would get used to being "latch-key kids." And, as to the shame, the public admission that they needed the money, well, that wouldn't worry her, she had asserted with a bulldog jut of her little chin, so long as it didn't worry him . . . As she got older, Merrily used her mother's methods of exaggeration more and more.

The Saturday lunch ended with Graham losing his temper. This prompted bad language from Henry, tears from Emma, and from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lilian and Merrily the identical expression of a camel patiently inviting the final straw. Merrily said they could take a hint and they would all go out for a walk in Richmond Park, "because at least then he couldn't object that they were spending any money."

Graham foolishly mentioned that the petrol in the car which would drive them the two miles to the park was not exactly free, and got a predictably dramatic reaction from Merrily. She produced her housekeeping purse and emptied its contents onto the kitchen table, begging Graham to help himself to however much it cost. She would hate him to feel that his wife was trying to cheat him.

When the house was finally empty of these elaborate ironies and recriminations, Graham poured himself a large Scotch and sat down. The awfulness of the lunch gave him a sense of righteousness. Everything awful that Merrily did now gave him strength, justification, a confirmation that his decision to murder her was the right one.

The shed was rarely used. Since they moved, the Marshalls had had too much to do in the house to pay much attention to the garden. The tools lay stacked against the wall as the removal men had left them. The hover-mower, the only piece of equipment which had been used the previous summer, lay across the floor, impacted grass beneath it giving off a damp vegetable smell.

Graham cleared the clutter of shears and bamboo canes from the table-top under the dusty window and put down his equipment. A dark-green bottle half full of sherry. A wine glass. And the large box of weed killer.

He broke off a foot-length of bamboo and was ready to begin his experiment. He hadn't done anything comparable since school and then it had been in rather different laboratory conditions. But this would be good enough to tell him what he wanted to know.

He poured an inch and a half of sherry into the wine glass. The brand he bought for Lilian was darker than the Tio Pepe she preferred, yellowish in color.

He took the box of weed killer and shook out its contents. The poison was contained in little sachets, eight in all. With a Stanley knife, he nicked the corner off one and looked inside.

His first shock was that the stuff was blue. Little blue granules rather like those tiny cake decorations known as "hundreds and thousands."

Oh, dear. Maybe they would change color as they dissolved. He poured a few granules into the wine glass and stirred vigorously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At first they seemed unwilling to liquefy at all, but then they did. The color, however, remained. The sherry turned bright, bright blue.

He wondered, not very seriously, about weaning Merrily off sherry and onto Blue Curaçoa, but, even if that could be achieved, he couldn't see her being fooled. The liquid had a nasty livid sheen on the top and an opaque sediment was forming at the bottom.

He sniffed it. The smell hadn't changed. That was one thing in its favor.

Hmm. Nobody was going to drink from a glass like that by mistake. Maybe from a bottle, though . . . ? It was worth trying.

He emptied the remains of the sachet into the sherry bottle and shook it vigorously. For a moment he set aside the problem of getting Merrily to drink straight from the bottle. Just see if it works first.

He looked through the dark-green glass. The adulteration of the contents was not apparent at first glance. The color didn't look odd. But when it was held up to the light the thick sediment showed, and when he looked close, undissolved granules clustered against the sides like some obscene Chinese meal.

It was pretty obvious it wasn't going to work, but something kept him going. Maybe it took time to dissolve. Maybe more would have the required effect.

He ripped open another sachet and, forming a funnel from a piece of cardboard torn off the box, poured the contents in. Another shake and the bottle's contents looked even more bizarre.

Suddenly the incongruity of his actions struck and he found himself laughing. The whole situation was farcical and filled him with a strange elation. He slit open the remaining six sachets and poured their stock of granules into the bottle. Then he shook it like a rattle, singing, through his giggles, the South American tune "La Bamba." What he was doing seemed the funniest thing that had ever happened to him. The seriousness of his intention and the crass incompetence of what he was doing triggered his wild hilarity.

At last he sobered up and looked at the bottle.

No. No one would ever be taken in by that blue mass of half-dissolved granules. The person who drank through that lot would have to be very, very determined to die.

He heard a noise from the house and looked up to see Merrily waving from the kitchen window. Damn. Hadn't noticed the time. Well, he couldn't wash up his experiment now. Do it some other time when he was alone in the house.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He shoved the bottle, the glass, and the remnants of the weed-killer packing on a shelf behind a large rectangular can of creosote.

Need for a rethink. Silly to imagine it would have been as easy as that. He went indoors, mildly irritated but not depressed by his failure.

He carried the Stanley knife to explain his presence in the shed. "Wondered where it had got to, darling," he said, kissing Merrily perfunctorily on the forehead.

"I'm surprised you can find anything in that shed," she accused. "It's a terrible mess. Really needs tidying."

"Yes. Yes. Yes."

"You must get round to it sometime."

"Sure."

"Though I suppose I'll have to end up doing it myself. Like most things," she concluded with a long-suffering sigh.

The remark was meant to make Graham feel guilty. But he was damned if he was going to let it. Guilt, he had decided, even for trivial matters, was not an emotion in which he intended to indulge in the future.

He was coming down from having shouted the children into bed when he met Lilian in the hall. She moved her arm behind her back, but too slowly. He saw the bottle of sherry in her hand.

"Where did you get that from?" he snapped.

She gave him the defiant look of the boy in *When Did You Last See Your Father?*, an expression that didn't suit her.

"In the shed."

"Why on earth did you go in there?"

"The bottle was around at lunchtime. I saw it. I knew you had hidden it somewhere, Graham."

"Why should I do that?"

She straightened up into a posture of martyrdom.

"I know you don't like me, Graham." She left a pause for the flood of contradictions, which didn't come.

"But I do think hiding the sherry's pretty petty."

"But I wasn't hiding it. I was just using the bottle. It's not sherry in there."

"It smells like sherry."

Oh, God. Had she snatched a quick tipple out in the shed? What effect would it have? He had wanted to test the dosage somehow, but this was not the way he would have chosen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, it isn't sherry!" He snatched the bottle from her quite roughly. "I was just using it for something in the garden. If you want a drink, there's some wine in the fridge."

A deep breath telegraphed the start of Lilian's weeping. "I think you're very cruel to me, Graham. You know I'm desperately upset about how Charmian behaved. And now you—I expected a bit of support from you. I wouldn't have changed my will if I'd known—"

"Oh, for God's sake!" Graham stumped off towards the garden. Going through the utility room, he saw the sticky labels Merrily used to identify food in the freezer. He tore one off and wrote on it with felt pen: POISON. NOT TO BE TAKEN.

He stuck it over the bottle's original label. Out in the shed, he hid the bottle deep in the corner behind a pile of seed trays. Too risky to put it in the dustbin. He'd dispose of it another time.

He looked out of the dusty window to the lights of the house next door. How warming, welcoming other people's lights looked. Perhaps, he thought wryly, that was how the lights of his house looked to outsiders, the glow of a happy family within. Huh.

It was going wrong. Lilian's finding the sherry shouldn't have happened. He had taken a stupid, unnecessary risk.

In fact, his whole approach had been wrong. Slipshod. Inefficient.

He had killed the old man effortlessly and that was now a source of fierce pride. But killing Merrily would take more cunning. In the euphoria of having made the decision, he had been careless, underestimated the difficulties that faced him.

Just because of his failure to get George's job, he must not let his standards slip. He had always prided himself on efficiency, and now he had to demonstrate that he was more efficient than Robert Benham. Since he was prevented from deploying his skills at the office, then he would apply them to his wife's murder.

No more carelessness.

Detailed, systematic planning.

He was determined that the murder was going to work.

It was Merrily herself who showed him how to do it . . .

Flash: Simon Brett's *A Shock to the System* has just been awarded a scroll by the Mystery Writers of America as one of the five best novels published in the U.S. in 1985.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Speaking of poison . . .

THE PATIENT CUP

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Dr. Calderón and Captain Cortés are discussing a friend—or, rather, acquaintance. De Lancey Stone, charming and incorruptible, is the gringo's name. Or is *one* of his names. It is he who preys principally upon *las estrangeras*. Preferably Americans, though he has been known not to disdain to snare, skin, draw, and cook British, Scandinavian, French, Swiss, etc., women. "If you can't get five, take four," is his wicked motto. He has been compared to both that vile Venetian, Casanova, and the late Harley Crippen, M.D., doubtless to the defamation of both of them. Stone is in his ageless early middle-age, tall, pale, soft. He hates the sun and he hates hard work like the very devil.

If Lance Stone has gotten all he can get out of his woman-of-the-moment, and in such a way that he can decamp without fear of a fuss being kicked up—a fuss of a sort to bring down the authorities, that is: mere scenes do not vex him—then he decamps. But if it should seem needful, or merely prudent—in order to obtain more or in order to prevent subsequent outcry—then he disposes of his victims. How? Why, by the administration of a certain white powder, *videlicet* arsenic.

But this is passé by reason of arsenic's yielding up its even slightest trace to scientific testing? Ah, but first science must *test*—and, as Stuart Chase might put it: Science is not a man and hence is never suspicious. Arsenic, like syphilis, is a great masquerader. One of the diseases arsenic poisoning often masquerades as is dysentery. And what is that disease which foreigners in Mexico suffer from above all others? Montezuma's Revenge, or, the Aztec Curse. In short—dysentery. Far from being suspicious and desiring to perform post-mortem examinations and to use the famous tests of Messrs. Reinsch, Fleitman, and Marsh, the Mexican authorities desire most fervently a quick disposition of the remains. The cause of their *be-*

© *1986 by Avram Davidson.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

coming remains they are apt to attribute to heart disease or some other one of mankind's ills not resultant in any way from the exquisite climate and salubrious air of their native land.

In this climate (even Eden having had its serpent) De Lancey Stone throve.

Laws, effective in most countries civilized enough to produce arsenic poisoners, require that drug when sold at retail to be mixed with lampblack or similar coloring. This not only makes it difficult to mix the article with salt or sugar or dissolve it undetected in hot milk, soup, gruel, etc., but leaves traces in the human body. When even hair and nails bear witness . . . But Señor Stone sidestepped this stumbling-block with the greatest of ease. He bought his arsenic at wholesale. *How?* If you have to ask, you are clearly unfit to become a successful poisoner and it is no part of our duty to assist you.

The matter of Señorita Metzger—"Fräulein," if you prefer—is the pivot on which this tale swings. (Tales, you say, do not swing—they hang? But surely, in at least one very significant context, are not the verbs synonymous?) Miss Metzger, when Stone first knew her during the War, was not many steps ahead of famine. So he was affable to her—for it would never do to get out of practice—but that was all. Miss Metzger gave lessons in German and French, acted occasionally as guide and comprador to those U.S. tourists who were then available, all of their money in $2.00 bills—a stratagem designed somehow to foil the Axis. Axis—strange how dated the word now sounds, yesterday's enemy being today's ally. Except, of course, for Bulgaria. Per*fidi*ous Bulgaria.

Otherwise Miss Metzger tried to maintain a European standard of living on an income inadequate even by local standards. She looked so clearly close to the edge and accepted so swiftly Lance Stone's automatic invitation to sit at his table that he proceeded to buy her a supper the equal of which she had not had in months, perhaps even years. But he did so only in order to keep in practice—she, the rubber ball squeezed to keep the wrist in tone; he, the smiler honing, so to speak, his knife.

So it was that after the War, Stone, coming upon Miss Pauline Metzger again, finding her cheeks no longer sagging but plump—though his viper's eye noted she was no less nervous—was pleased to accept *her* invitation to sit.

"I have it, I have it at last," she told him, looking around covertly. Nor was much time passed before Stone discovered that "it" was a small fortune in Austrian *schilling*, a very stable currency—trust

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him to know that—family funds recently released from Nazi sequestration.

"*Gnaedischen fräulein—*" he summoned up all his hochdeutsch, discovered that this was the sum of it, lapsed into English "—I am so glad" (this was perfect truth, he was) "for you." (This was a lie. For him*self,* he was glad.)

Miss Metzger, who had endured adversity (though just barely), was unman'd by prosperity. She suspected that everyone was after her and her money. Actually, no one was, except De L. Stone, the one person upon whom her sicklied phantasies did not rest. *Au contraire.*

"Dear Herr Stone," she told him, whispering hotly, "you were so kind to me, you fed me when I was hungry, it is only you whom I can trust." And so the poor, fond woman invited him to share her house and board and act as guardian against the evil, seeking world. The money was in the house—Pauline didn't trust banks. Mentally translating Austrian into Mexican and thence into U.S. currency, Stone realized that he had about $40,000 all but at his fingertips. It was no great sum—but for the transfer of it she had to die.

The arsenic was both sweet and stringent in its taste. Stone served it up to poor Pauline in tea after first dissolving it in fifteen parts of boiling water. The sugar served to mask the sweetness and the lemon covered up the astringency with its own. He did not rush things. A week would do nicely.

"Lance, they are trying to poison me!" she moaned at him, appearing suddenly out of the dark.

Who?

"The merchants, the servants! Come, we must get away at once, Lance, quickly!" Part of it may have been the increasing effect of the arsenic; most of it was the increasing effect of her own crumbling hold on reality. She babbled. He listened. Somewhere in the room a large insect buzzed and clicked.

They were to leave at once. Quietly. She spoke now in the same whisper with which she first invited him to stay with her, hands clutching, breath sickly and hot. She had a safe place, she said, the house belonged to someone she knew: Miss Evans, a North American woman now away in Yucatán. She, the owner, would not mind. There they would be safe.

Stone had no objections. Particularly not when he saw the portfolio she hugged under her arm. Why dwell upon the ugly details? In the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

solitude of Miss Evans' house, he finished his evil work. The end was painful. (Arsenic poisoning often resembles the ravages of cholera.) He saw that in this case it would not do to expose the matter to the scrutiny of the Mexican authorities. For one thing, he had no business being in Miss Evans' house. For another, Miss Metzger's possession of a very large sum in cash was probably too well known. His method of disposing of the body was as old-fashioned as his method of murder. He buried it under the cellar floor. The owner, with North American firmness (read *obstinacy*) had fortunately insisted upon a cellar.

It was hard work, and he hated hard work. Any kind. As much as he hated the sun.

"Now to get the hell out of here," he said at last.

The traces of their stay were not many. He effaced the effaceable, tossed the rest into the single suitcase which Pauline Metzger's panicky flight had allowed of, tucked the portfolio under his arm carefully, and passed with deliberate haste into the night.

With characteristic discipline, he refrained from opening the portfolio until he was back in his old quarters in Mexico City.

It was stuffed with old letters, old photographs, old (and useless) documents, all relating to the long-past history of the Family Metzger.

But of money, new or old, there was no trace.

Bleakly but swiftly he burned the portfolio and all its contents —faded messages of love and hope. It had all been for nothing. *Damn* the woman!

Several months and several victims (non-fatal, however) later, Miss Metzger's ghost caught up with him. "Yes, I knew her," he said. The question had been asked by a casual acquaintance—Stone had no friends—at a bar most favored by Americans in Mexico City, but where even Americans are not favored should the man enter in shirt-sleeves. Lance fully approved of this—gave the place *tone*. "I knew Pauline. What's she doing nowadays?"

The acquaintance, an art dealer of questionable dealings in from San Miguel, snorted. "A lot of people would like to know. Ever hear of a wholesale jeweler by the name of Van Vloch? Well, Van Vloch sold her about thirty-five thousand dollars worth of diamonds last year not long after she got hold of all that money. Not only did she mistrust banks, she didn't even trust *money*—man's best friend."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Poor thing," said the dealer's wife, a thin woman whose expression indicated that she seldom drew high card in any of the deals.

Her husband shrugged. "Then she started skittering all around May-hee-co. Here today, gone tomorrow. And one day she *was* gone. So it's a mystery what she's done with herself and with the rocks. They stripped the last place she'd stayed before she vanished—stripped it to the plaster looking for the jewels and found nothing."

"She wore them in a sort of money-belt," his wife said knowledgeably. "She as much as told me so that last time we met. And then she got scared and—" The woman rattled on. Lance had ceased to listen. He was silently damning himself.

In that he had failed to open the portfolio at once.

In that he had failed to search the body before burying it.

Now he would have to go back to the house, dig up the cellar again. A peon's job. What a pity he couldn't find a stonemason to blindfold, as in the old tales. "Did you know Louise Evans?" the wife asked. Her husband performed the elaborate tequila ritual—lick the salt, drink, bite the lemon—before the gaze of admiring tourists. (Usually he skipped not only the ritual but the tequila as well, and drank whiskey.)

"Heard the name," said Stone, very truthfully.

"Well, she was an old friend of Pauline's. She was in Yucatán or somewhere when all this happened. But she came back a month ago. Has a house about an hour from here."

Damn. Complications. Stone had been planning a quiet nocturnal visit. But now— Aloud, he sought for helpful information. "Louise Evans. Was she the one who was so interested in serapes?"

The wife shook her head. "No, I know who you mean, but I can't think of her name." Not surprising, since Stone had made the whole thing up. All lady Americans living south of the border are "interested" in something of the sort. "Louise," she continued, "is interested in handmade Mexican glassware. You never met her? Tall, yellow-faced woman. Always sick. Always ailing."

Interested in handmade Mexican glassware.

Always sick. Always ailing.

Very good. In fact, excellent. Lance Stone would become interested in handmade Mexican glassware, would frequent places where it was sold. And if poor Pauline had to be followed by poor Louise, the latter's passing would not really surprise anyone.

"I beg your pardon, but aren't you Louise Evans?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why, yes, but I'm afraid I don't quite re—"

"De Lancey Stone. Lance, commonly known as. So you're interested in handmade Mexican glassware, too?"

Hesitation *(where* did I meet him?) was willingly displaced by enthusiasm. "I certainly am. Don't you just love these blue-tinted pieces with the little bubbles in them?"

Of course he did. He would have said he loved coproliths if she'd been interested in them. They passed a pleasant hour, and then—somewhat to his surprise, though not at all to his displeasure, the first invitation was hers. "I know a very clean little place. You have to be so careful about what you eat and drink here—but I wouldn't live anywhere else for the world."

"Oh, I quite agree. But I never, never drink unboiled water. Tea is it."

"But where can you get good tea in Mexico?"

And so Lance had little difficulty gaining entrée to the suburban villa (with cellar) yet again.

Key the first: glassware.

Key the second: a box of excellent tea from the British colony's grocer.

Key the third: more glassware.

Understand, Louise Evans was a virtuous woman. (Some said it was just that sex didn't interest her. They may have been jealous.) But she was not hindered by old-fashioned convention from inviting Lance to move into one of the rooms at her place—oddly enough, the one he'd occupied on his previous stay. Which gave him not a single qualm. Is a butcher ever vexed by memories of bleating lambs?

"It's a sensible idea, Lance," Louise said. "We're good friends. We have so much in common. And we're each mature enough not to make demands the other isn't prepared to fulfill." (She means I'm to stay out of her bedroom, he thought. She needn't worry, with that phone-pole figure and face like a palomino mare.) "And, well, why shouldn't I be frank, Lance? Since I don't have to charge you rent, you can use the money for other things."

He allowed himself to be convinced. At first he thought in the following terms: get her to agree to some out-of-town jaunt, say to Cuautla for Zapata's birthday, then beg off on account of illness; give Serafina and Concepción the day off; do what he had to do in the cellar. However, when the day arrived she absolutely refused to go without him. "It isn't safe, Lance—all those drunken Indios.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And I couldn't leave you here sick." He shrugged. So be it. On her own head. Anyway, she had lots of jewelry.

Serafina, the cook, was a stolid Indian woman. She had demons of her own and was quite unable to assimilate those of her mistress. Which, Lance soon noted, was very useful. "Louise, did you know that after Serafina boils the rice she uses *unboiled* water to wash it, or cool it?"

Serafina, guilty or otherwise, never comprehended the issue enough to seem innocent. How fortunate, then, that Lance was such a good cook. Louise enjoyed his dishes enormously. Serafina's replacement was postponed indefinitely. Then Concepción, the maid, began to break glassware while dusting. Of course, she denied it, but who else *could* it be? Concepción's successor worked only part-time. *She* lived *out*.

From time to time, Louise fell ill. She had pains here, there, everywhere. "My pills, Lance dear," she moaned. "My tonic." Her physician turned out to be Dr. Calderón, a courtly old gentleman whose ideas—medical as well as political—seemed to have frozen sometime previous to the overthrow of Don Porfirio Diaz. He sighed as Lance went with him to the door, shook his head, thrust out his lower lip lugubriously. Lance was never sure himself that Lou was really ill—she did have that super-sallow complexion—but it was enough that others, particularly medicos, thought so. "The poor miss is disturbed in her corpus the most severely," said Dr. Calderón.

And so the time arrived to get things finished.

"I don't really care for lemon in my tea, dear."

"You must, dear. I can afford to take chances with my health, you cannot. Lemon promotes regularity." And disguises the astringent taste of the arsenical preparation. So—up from the kitchen, neatly on a tray, already prepared: two cups of tea. Lance's with canned milk. Louise's with lemon.

For several days Louise seemed to be growing weaker. She vomited. Had pains. And suddenly rallied.

It was most unfair. Lance couldn't stick around forever. So at breakfast he doubled the dose. At noon he tripled it. At noon, too, the cleaning woman left for the day. Within an hour Louise began to moan and call out for him. At four the sounds ceased. Lance, listening at the door, couldn't even hear breathing from inside. He smiled—then frowned. There was the cellar to dig up. It would be easier this time, but still it was bound to be damned hard work. He hated labor as much as he hated the sun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sweating copiously, aching in every bone, socket, and sinew, he paused a moment. Voices in the house! He dashed upstairs. There was Dr. Calderón. And—incredible, but there she was—Louise!

"Where were you when I was so *sick*—what were you doing while I was *crying* for you?" she demanded furiously. "And what are you up to in the cellar, all *mucky* like that? Never mind—I'll see for myself." She flung open the door. And shrieked.

Lance leaped at her, clapped his hand over her mouth, and flung her to the floor. Dr. Calderón, of course, shouting Castilian imprecations, was no match for the younger man in hand-to-hand combat, and he knew it. "*¡Policía!*" he cried. "*¡Qué bruto! ¡Qué barbaridad! ¡Ayúdeme! ¡Policía!*" he cried—and promptly brained the gringo with the poker.

"To think that such a fiend is to be encountered in our beloved city in current times," says Dr. Calderón, shaking his head.

"A fiend, a fiend," confirms Captain of the Police Cortés. He and the medico are old friends, often meeting to drink a rather ghastly *cocktailito* compounded of rum, tequila, aguardiente, and strawberry pop. "Fortunately, he is no longer to be encountered in our beloved city, *a ja ja!* Mexican justice may be by norteamericano standards slow, but it is secure. It was obvious from the barbaric violence of the fiend's reaction who had killed poor Mees Metzger. Nor did our diligence fail to uncover many witnesses once the cold trail of the nocturnal flight of the lady and the fiend to the house of Mees Evans was warmed over by us."

Dr. Calderón nods. "He is fortunate that the death penalty for murder no longer exists in this exceedingly civilized State. One could almost regret—"

His compeer frowns very slightly. "One need not. He will not much enjoy thirty years without pardon or parole—if he lives to serve them all—not on that barren rock of an island where lies the prison of this State whose laws he flouted so viciously, the fiend. All day long he must toil at the severest kind of manual labor. The sun is blazing hot. It will blaze behind his eyelids even when he closes them at night, blaze like the diamonds he sought and did not find. —Any more than we did. Who can say *where* the unfortunate defunct secreted them, eh?"

Dr. Calderón lights a pura and, pursing his lips, blows a smoke ring. "Who indeed. Unmarried women of a certain age and of foreign nationality are sometimes of eccentric tendency. Do you know for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whom I feel sorry? Mees Louise Evans. Naturally she feels obliged to leave that house. How upsetting for her."

The waiter comes with little dishes of salted squash seeds and of chilis and of toasted beans. The friends nibble and sip.

"But she will not leave our beloved city, I trust?" asks Cortés.

"Ah, no, she likes it much here. City and people are to her taste. And, if I may be immodest, she values my ministrations."

Drops glisten momentarily upon the moustache of the police official. "As well she may," he asserts. "As well she may."

His friend coughs, waves his hand, disturbs his smoke circles. "It is really quite curious— Perhaps I betray professional confidences— No, no: to the police as to the clergy one may confide everything. So—it is really curious, this matter of the arsenic. You are aware, of course, that this drug not only destroyed unfortunate Mees Metzger's life but simultaneously preserved her body so that it was of easy identification. You may or may not be aware that the substance has several such unusual properties. Certain medical circles deride its use as a medicament, but I, my friend, I tell you earnestly that I swear by it.

"I have no belief at all in what are known as psychosomatic ailments, *none*. In my young days there was no such nonsense and the value of arsenical tonics was widely appreciated. Unmarried ladies of a certain age—Mees Louise Evans, *por ejemplo* and in strictest confidence—"

"Of course, of course. The strictest!"

"—stand, I feel, in particular need of an arsenical tonic. I have been dosing her with such for years. True, it has given her a rather yellow complexion, but of what consequence is that? It is obvious that she does not contemplate marriage. Arsenic, you understand, does not addict, but it does habituate. As a result, I have been obliged to increase the dosage many, many times. *¿Qué quiere usted?* If she had a proper family, they would have arranged a marriage for her decades ago."

Captain of the Police Cortés nodded, somewhat absently, his agreement to this last point. His attention had fixed on something else. "Then, Doctor, I would suppose that the amount of arsenic which Mees Louise Evans consumes in the course of a week would *kill* an ordinary person."

"Perhaps several," said Dr. Calderón. They finished their *cocktailitos* and called the waiter for two more.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW*** short story by

NELL LAMBURN

This exceptional story is the first we have the good fortune to publish by British writer Nell Lamburn, who has been widely published in British magazines. Her first story, which had a supernatural twist, was published when she was twenty-one in Argosy *magazine. She and her Army-officer husband Michael have traveled widely, have a grown son and daughter, and live in a 400-year-old thatched farmhouse in Wiltshire.*

Tom Molyneaux's father had been a shepherd, his grandfather, too—and now his home was the wheeled hut they'd once summered in on the Plain, parked unassailably on his own plot of land across the field behind April Cottage. But his uncles had been thatchers and, reckoning the fashion for thatch being more stable than that of sheep, young Tom had apprenticed himself to his uncles instead, to become the best thatcher thereabouts . . .

TOM'S THATCH

by NELL LAMBURN

Mrs. Spreadbury was a very particular woman. She was particular about her person, her cottage, and her husband. But most of all, she was particular about her garden.

Mr. Spreadbury used a stronger word. "My wife is ob-sessed," he would announce to anyone who would listen, dividing the word in order to squeeze every particle of meaning from it. "Quite ob-sessed. Never leaves it alone. Out there, tinkering about, whatever the weather. It's a brave weed that shows its face in Alice's garden."

They rarely did. Out had gone the creeping buttercup, the couch

© 1986 by Nell Lamburn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grass, and the ground elder. Out, too, the bindweed and the convolvulus, plucked, poisoned, and burned.

"Heretics. She's at it, burning heretics," Mr. Spreadbury would murmur as the grey-blue smoke rose straight and true from behind the wattle fencing at the bottom of the garden. And if he dared venture down there, he'd see her prodding and poking the smoldering mound, the light of fanaticism concentrated on her round and rosy face.

It was a very pretty garden, just what a cottage garden should be. Lupins, delphiniums, heavy-headed roses. Hollyhocks, canterbury bells, cornflowers and pansies, they grew and blossomed in succession, obeying like some floral orchestra the harmonizing of her green fingers. There was always the music of color in Alice's garden, even in winter.

Tourists, quartering the scent to Stonehenge and Salisbury Cathedral, paused in the village of Chilton Magna to photograph and admire, and in Mrs. Spreadbury's desk there was an album of prints sent from all over the world. There was also a postcard, available, albeit in black-and-white, at the Chilton Magna Post Office and General Stores. In it, Mrs. Spreadbury stood smiling and apple-cheeked at the cottage gate, the roses about the porch yearning toward the deep snug-cap of thatch. You couldn't quite see her eyes, though, eyes like little chips of blue-grey Wiltshire flint. That would have quite spoilt the image.

Mr. Spreadbury was not in the photographs. Sometimes, in fact, he wondered if he were anywhere at all. Sometimes he thought that all he was was a pair of Wellington boots at the back door, two hands at the driving wheel, a porter of shopping baskets. Sometimes he felt so superfluous, so insubstantial, that he was surprised his wife didn't bustle right through him.

It hadn't always been like this. At the Reliable Insurance Company, before he retired, he had been a man of authority, commanding a personal office, a secretary, and luncheon vouchers. Then, April Cottage had seemed an extension of the orderliness, routine, and security that prevailed at work. He'd prided himself on teamwork and he and Alice made a fine, disciplined team. It was only on his retirement that he discovered that his place in that team had never really existed. He was required neither in the garden nor the house—yet so necessary was he to the image of Mrs. Spreadbury's life that she would rarely allow him from her vicinity. He decorated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her existence like her Seventeenth Century bible box and her rosewood tea caddy, whose original uses were long passed away.

He took to going for walks, something he'd never cared for very much, and spending more money than he could afford at The Green Man. A whiskey or three dulled the burgeoning realization that this was to be the order of his life, this living non-existence. He sat on the black-oak settle, smoking his only pipe of the day, and a sort of bewilderment would encompass him, a vague resentment at the unfairness of it all. Had the past sixty-odd years really been moving toward this nothingness? It seemed to Mr. Spreadbury, pondering in the snug of The Green Man, that God had played him a terrible trick.

They had no friends, because to entertain made clutter and untidyness, and Mrs. Spreadbury said they had no time to visit. He would have liked a dog. His father had had a dog. He'd always planned to have a dog one day. He'd have enjoyed walking then. A spaniel perhaps, all enthusiastic ears. Or a labrador, honey-colored, melting eyes. Even a mongrel, quivering intelligence. But there were no dogs, no animals at all.

There were no children, either. He would have liked those, too, but Alice had never been very enthusiastic. In fact, in little scenes that he preferred to forget, she had demonstrated both vocally and physically just how unenthusiastic she had been. In the face of such antagonism, his desire to procreate had spluttered and faded, becoming an intermittent ache that occurred less and less frequently.

There should be grandchildren now. But instead there was a full stop after the sentence of his life. No subparagraphs, no postscripts. Now and then, when the bonds fretted too sharply and the whiskey lubricated his dreams, he entertained crazy ideas of escaping to some fruitful girl who would surround him with little, loving replicas, who would let him potter in the garden and smoke his pipe in bed and play his records. There was, after all, for him, still time.

But the ideas passed like summer storms, like the occasional flutterings of a bird against its confining bars. Ashamed, he knew that if the cage door were opened he was too conditioned to captivity to escape.

So the dissatisfaction and frustration of his life would be stilled and he would assume again the mien of a contented man.

And so it might have continued if it hadn't been for the winter of the great rains, as it came to be known. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At first it fell gently and unassumingly, washing the spikes of winter wheat to an emerald brilliance, muddying the shallow chalk streams and teasing the tracks across the plain to toffee. No one took it very seriously, and so, affronted, a viciousness edged it, cutting the earth like little knives, filling the streams and soaking the thin topsoil so that the natural reservoirs beneath the chalk burst their veins and the springs gushed furiously early. To the villagers of Chilton Magna and thereabouts, it seemed to be raining above and below them, they seemed to be squeezed in a great wet sandwich of water.

At April Cottage, the thatch darkened and dripped, the bonfire rotted unburnt, and curious molds and fungi latticed stalks and leaves and trunks.

Mrs. Spreadbury drew in her apple cheeks and buttoned her little thin lips, darting about the garden in increasing anxiety while tawny, slime-shiny slugs taunted her and mottle-shelled snails trailed their glistening threads to tease her.

"Don't worry so, my dear," Mr. Spreadbury counseled ill-advisedly. "Nature will right itself. It always does." Thus irritating his wife still further.

As if to refute his advice, the winds curled their tongues about the rain and spewed it venomously upon the thatched roofs of Chilton Magna and those other villages that trickled like narrow streams themselves amongst the ancient valleys of the Plain.

The bathroom eaves were the first to surrender, the leisured dripping of the leak hardly noticeable amongst the normal activity of pipes and cisterns. But the rich dark stain in the spare bedroom was alert enough and within twenty-four hours the breach was complete, the saturated thatch had yielded.

With difficulty, Mr. Spreadbury eased his stubby body through the trapdoor into the loft while Mrs. Spreadbury hovered, incensed face uplifted, on the landing below, an armory of buckets and bowls beside her. The chill dampness struck him unpleasantly as he balanced on the network of rafters, the inadequate beam of his torch stabbing the darkness with rings of pale light. It was a long time since he'd been up here.

When they'd first bought the cottage, he'd had such plans for this loft—he'd peopled it with sons and daughters—their own playroom. He'd even designed it down to the last lightbulb. A ball of resentment pushed at him. It was Alice's fault it was empty. All Alice's fault. It was a pity he'd never converted it anyway, because he could have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

used it himself, pulling up the ladder like a drawbridge. He could have smoked up here, worn his old grey cardigan, made those soldier models he'd been so fond of, and listened to the old records Alice refused to have played.

As he placed the bowls and buckets beneath the leaks, a sudden surge of determination emboldened him. There was absolutely nothing to stop him converting it now. He could do most of it himself, he'd enjoy that. For a moment, the clouds of his life parted—he saw a celestial vision of solitude and peace before reality obscured it. Alice's reality. She would never allow the cottage to be disrupted to such a degree. The struggle would be exhausting, every stage a wounding encounter that would bleed him dry of ambition and courage. The conversion would become his penance, she would never miss an opportunity to flagellate him with it. And as swiftly as the plan was born, it died. But, unaccustomedly, the bruise of resentment remained.

"Well? Is it all right now? Have you fixed it?" Mrs. Spreadbury pecked the questions at him as he eased himself slowly down the ladder.

"For the moment." He went into the bathroom to wash his hands. "We'll need the thatcher come spring, though. That north slope is bad, got very patchy. You don't see it from the outside. Some of it must be four foot thick, other bits you can almost see through." He began to sound important. This was something for him to decide, Alice hadn't seen the roof, she'd have to take his word for it. "I'll mention it to Tom Molyneaux, he'll be in The Green Man tonight, he always is on a Friday." He looked at himself in the mirror, jutting his chin a little as he dried his hands on the pink flowered towel. "Have to book him early, you see."

"Tom Molyneaux? I'm not having that man near my house." Mrs. Spreadbury stood in the doorway, her back deliberately turned to him as if he were performing some intimate ablution. "He's filthy."

"He's an excellent thatcher, my dear. That's all that matters. He's the best thatcher hereabouts." He narrowed his eyes at himself, patting the thickened line of his chin. "Everyone will be after him."

"Then let them." Her voice began to shrill. "The council shouldn't let him keep that terrible hut he lives in, it's a disgrace to the village. They should make him go into a council house, the health people should make him. It's full of rats and—and disease."

"I think you exaggerate, my dear. You can't possibly know."

"You only have to look at the place—and goodness knows it's near

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enough for us to see." Mrs. Spreadbury darted past him, replacing the once-used hand towel with a fresh one. "Mrs. Ellison has seen rats there, ones as big as cats. They didn't run away, either—just sat and looked at her. Petrified her. You just find some other thatcher, not Tom Molyneaux."

And as far as Mrs. Spreadbury was concerned, the matter was closed.

But not, to his own surprise, for Mr. Spreadbury.

Tom Molyneaux was a long man, long and narrow like the hazel spars he worked with. Nose and chin, arms and hands, even his feet. But particularly his hands. Dark, calloused, stubby-nailed, knob-jointed, they splayed across his knees as he sat in the snug of The Green Man that Friday night.

His father had been a shepherd, his grandfather, too—and now his home was the wheeled hut they'd once summered in on the Plain, parked, unassailably, on his own plot of land across the field behind April Cottage. But his uncles had been thatchers and, reckoning the fashion for thatch being more stable than that of sheep, young Tom had apprenticed himself to his uncles instead, to become, as Mr. Spreadbury pronounced, the best thatcher thereabouts.

Mr. Spreadbury admired him greatly. Here was a man who was his own master, answerable only to himself, a free man, a dark and secret man. Often on his solitary walks, he would pause to wonder at his skills and, to his satisfaction, Tom Molyneaux would sometimes come down his ladder to share a noisome pipe with him and comment on this and that. There was little in Chilton Magna or thereabouts that escaped his narrow eyes.

Mrs. Spreadbury always knew. "You've been near that Tom Molyneaux again!" she'd accuse him, wrinkling her little nose accusingly. "I can smell him—go and wash, go and change!" Obediently, he would scrub his hands and face and hang his jacket on the line. Until the next time.

Now he got up from the oak settle and crossed the stone-flagged floor to the bar. (In the lounge bar there was vinyl flooring and draloned seats. Mrs. Spreadbury would much have preferred him in the lounge bar.) There was a ritual to be observed, a slow, measured ritual: through the weather, a fresh pint, the Chilton Magna football team, work, the weather again, and, finally, the roof of April Cottage.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tom Molyneaux refilled his pipe before he answered, stabbing down the black tobacco with his long, stained forefinger.

"Your missus won't like it." He drew the words out slowly in his soft, Wiltshire voice with each suck of smoke. "She don't like me."

"You're the best. I want the best." Mr. Spreadbury rolled his shoulders back importantly. "I think your uncle thatched it—must be over twenty years ago. But I never realized it had got so bad, not until all this rain."

"Patchy. Been watching it. Some of it four foot thick, I reckon. Some not. Needed ridging five years back. Surprised it's not gone before now."

Mr. Spreadbury didn't feel aggrieved that he hadn't warned him. Just pleased that not only had he been correct about the thickness of it, but that Tom'd been keeping an eye on it, as if the roof were singled out for Divine favor.

"Then you'll do it?"

"Cost you."

"The best always does." Mr. Spreadbury was on firmer ground, commercial ground now. "I wouldn't want anyone else."

Tom Molyneaux flared one narrow nostril, slitting his pale eyes against the pipe smoke.

"Reckon the missus won't like it."

Mr. Spreadbury began to feel afronted, as if his manhood had been called into question.

"There's not much she does like," he said excusingly. "But she'll come round to the idea. She doesn't like mess, that's all, doesn't like her surroundings untidy, particularly the garden."

"Thatchin's a mucky business. Reckon she'll agree?" Tom Molyneaux was looking at him sideways, slyly, and Mr. Spreadbury had the uncomfortable feeling of being mocked.

"She won't have a choice." He puffed out his cheeks. "I shall tell her that you are going to do it—that is, if you will. It's got to be done and I want the best. She'll see the sense in that. She always wants things to look their best."

Tom Molyneaux scratched the back of his head, tipping his flat stained cap forward on his straggling hair, and Mr. Spreadbury held his breath.

"I'll do it, then. Be the spring, mind you. But I'll come, I'll come."

Fear and elation effervesced in Mr. Spreadbury's breast as he bought a further round of drinks. A fourth whiskey would not come amiss, not with what he had to face at home. Tom Molyneaux was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a man of his word. If he said the spring then the spring it would be. A bond as binding as anything in law. There'd be time enough for Alice to accept the idea.

Later, stepping gingerly along the dark and puddle-sodden road, it seemed a ridiculous idea to court her rage so prematurely. As the whiskey bravery seeped out of his nerve ends, he argued that it would be actively foolhardy to encourage her anger at this stage. Weeks of recriminations stretched ahead, exhausting and bowing him, perhaps even breaking him so that he'd have to cancel Tom Molyneaux.

He shuddered. No one cancelled Tom Molyneaux. No one crossed Tom Molyneaux, either. Mr. Spreadbury's feet stumbled with his thoughts and he had to stand for a minute, breathing deeply, while the whiskey waltzed about his head.

They said Mrs. Grantley Patterson hadn't paid him, despite her acres, and all Chilton Magna knew what had happened to *her*. Mr. Dowset, too, who'd short-changed him on the straw—no good had come to him, either. That young couple from London who'd thought they were so clever— Coincidence perhaps. Perhaps not. All he did know was that he wouldn't like Tom Molyneaux's anger directed at him, not at all. Better to surprise Mrs. Spreadbury—shock tactics, and while she was adjusting and absorbing, the job would begin. A nice case of *fait accompli*, as the French so neatly put it.

Mrs. Spreadbury left April Cottage only once a week, and that was on Tuesday market day in Salisbury. At eight-thirty sharp, Mr. Spreadbury would bring the Ford to the front gate, arrange the baskets and bags on the back seat, and hold open the door while his wife admired, for the statutory few minutes, the splendors of her garden.

And on this particular spring morning there was a great deal to admire. Patches of purple croci stippled the lawn. Clumps of daffodils and narcissi, like crusty yellow cream, lay thick on the brown earth of the beds. Pdyanthus buds dared to show their hues, bright eyes through their masks of green. The skeletons of the climbing roses latticed the whitened flint-and-brick walls and yellow starred forsythia bunched by the garden shed. It was an orderly and contented garden, a garden that knew exactly where it was going. You could almost say a well adjusted and self-satisfied garden. No muddle or confusion here. And it was a measure of Mrs. Spreadbury's ability that so much had been salvaged from the savage rains of the winter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Come along, don't dilly-dally!" Every week, as if the delay were his fault, she said the same, plumping down on the front seat, a hen fluffing out her feathers, and every week Mr. Spreadbury felt the nerves at the back of his head tighten and quiver. Sometimes, he thought, he felt like a violin, each ensuing, predictable remark of Mrs. Spreadbury's stringing him tighter and tighter until one day he felt he would snap.

On market days he became porter and baggage carrier, walking two paces behind while his wife rooted out the bargain truffles, one of the band of husbands who, after a working life of independence, were trapped into this servitude. While he was still at the office, they'd come to the Saturday market and there he'd never felt so conspicuous. But on Tuesdays he was pinpointed, a marked man, slide-eyeing the others of his ilk.

They lunched, as always, at the same black-beamed restaurant —£2.80 set menu—and afterward Mr. Spreadbury enjoyed his hour and a half freedom while his wife pursued her personal shopping. Sometimes he walked down to Victoria Park and sat by the river. At others he strolled about The Close—he liked that when the tourists were there, they were a funny lot. Then there were the book shops and the library— The time went only too quickly. Sometimes, after a particularly trying morning, he would contemplate flight. For a few moments he would relish the thought of Mrs. Spreadbury's growing impatience, her anger and consternation, her distress and remorse, her ultimate prayers for forgiveness if only he'd go back. But it was never more than a dream, the impracticalities hedging him in, bomalike, his own character the most impenetrable thorn of all.

On that Tuesday afternoon, as always, the same desire goaded his mind, daring him, and as always he backed away, returning slowly to the car and servitude. He was, he thought in disgust, like those laboratory rats so conditioned to run a certain distance that when the partition was removed they still could not exceed that length.

But oh! on their return to April Cottage, how he wished that he had!

Nothing during their journey home intimated the catastrophe that awaited them. No gathering of clouds, no rumblings of divine thunder, no single magpie or solitary crow perched on the rooftop.

Tom Molyneaux had finished for the day, but the evidence of his presence was only too clear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Spreadbury, her hand on the white slatted gate, screamed sharply, once, and Mr. Spreadbury, bending into the boot, straightened too quickly, wrenching his back. But the pain was banished by what he saw. Rusted roof wire mottled the lawn, crumpling the croci. New straw was stacked in sheaves by the shed, carelessly crushing the forsythia. A ladder rested against the roof, and over the flowerbed was cast a mantle of old straw pulled from the roof, through which the daffodils, like drowning men, upthrust their desperate faces.

It was, in reality, no more than disorder. But for Mrs. Spreadbury, it was disaster.

Wordlessly, she darted through the gate, plucking the straw with little incoherent cries, trying to prop up the drooping heads, tugging the sheaves from the forsythia. But it did not, strangely, touch Mr. Spreadbury's heart. There was no love in her concern, and he waited, bracing himself for the inevitable accusation.

The attack lasted the entire evening. He did not defend himself, only murmuring at intervals:

"Tom Molyneaux is the best. You'd want the best, wouldn't you?"

It was the wisest course he could have taken. Sustained attack against non-aggression is difficult to maintain and by bedtime her fury had coagulated into solid antagonism.

"I'll not have him in the house, you just make that clear! He's not stepping inside my house—horrid, filthy man." She scrubbed viciously at the hot-milk saucepan. "He stays outside and I'll bill him for every plant he harms, you just tell him that."

Of course, Mr. Spreadbury didn't. He wouldn't have dared. And to his surprise, neither did she. Instead, she scuttled from window to window, staring, her little lips pursed and angry, her eyes persecuting. But if Tom Molyneaux so much as glanced toward her, she curled up her lip in a sneer and with a flounce of her shoulders was gone.

It occurred to Mr. Spreadbury then, with the sort of wondering realization reserved for the witness of miracles, that Mrs. Spreadbury was intimidated. Not physically, but mentally. He had never seen her so before and he wasn't quite sure that she was aware of it. She was like some small, venomous thing, fluttering at the window, darting out at night to glean the loose straw, inspect the flowers, trample the old wire into even squares which Mr. Spreadbury must stack behind the wattle fence.

Tom Molyneaux never said a thing, but he knew—he knew all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right. Each morning he would look around the tidied garden from under his hooded lids and then, gathering his tools with a slow deliberateness, climb his ladder and begin to cast down the old brown straw so that it lapped the cottage like a muddied tide. Mr. Spreadbury had never seen him make so much mess at any of the other houses he had thatched, and the thought that perhaps he was being quite deliberate in his actions made Mr. Spreadbury horribly nervous. A confrontation between the two of them would inevitably mean that he would be trapped in the middle, and he perspired at the very thought. He would be destroyed. He didn't know how, but he would be, and deep inside him, all amongst the soft center of acquiescence and placation, there stirred a worm of survival. His monotonous and featureless life suddenly began to seem overwhelmingly attractive, and in his anxiety he abased himself before the both of them, attempting to anticipate any confrontation like some plump, middle-aged go-between. Instead, it only increased Mrs. Spreadbury's impatience, venting on him her revulsion against Tom Molyneaux, snapping and snarling at him throughout the day so that he spent an increasing time in the garden, hovering in the thatcher's protective shadow.

He'd placed an old table and two chairs in the shed and he'd carry two mugs of tea down there several times a day.

"Tea!" he'd call in a jovial voice and Tom Molyneaux would glance down from his high ladder and nod imperceptibly, following in his own time to the brown depths of the shed.

Mr. Spreadbury liked it there. The smell of compost and creosote and earth comforted him, backed like an animal into its lair. They didn't talk much, but, daringly, Mr. Spreadbury brought out his pipe, too, so that soon the familiar earth smells were soaked up by a heavy miasma of tobacco smoke that permeated the walls of the shed itself.

Mr. Spreadbury was very careful never to be in there alone. Sometimes he saw his wife venture from the kitchen, her little tip-tilted nose he'd once thought so charming sniffing the air, all the world like a venturing vole. She would dart a few steps toward them and then, casting about, seem to think better of it and retreat to the house again. When he took the mugs into the kitchen, she would scrub them out with soda and invent little irritating jobs for him to keep him from the garden.

But it could not loosen his pleasure in the thick crust of crisp

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

golden thatch that was edging across the roof. He watched Tom Molyneaux's great grimed hands twisting the bazel spars, driving them through the new straw with his wooden mallet, evening the bundles with his legget—the heavy, square, handled board with its wooden studs that had belonged to his uncles. And watching as the days passed, he felt that he, too, was working there, his own hands stung from the sharp straw, his knees ached from pressing upon the ladder rungs, and he felt, in the evening, the satisfaction of a good day's work. He began to think of it as a joint creation, his and Tom's, and would talk of "us" and "we" and "our." For the first time since he left the Reliable Insurance Company, he felt he had a purpose, felt he was achieving something, was a man again. He began to look forward to each day, there seemed a point now to getting up, and if Tom Molyneaux resented his plump, balding, self-appointed assistant, he never showed it.

But as Mr. Spreadbury found a curious contentment, so his wife, in ratio, became less so. Each evening when he returned indoors, she whittled away at him with the chisel of her nagging, her criticizing, her objections, until he expected to see little flakes of himself like stone chips scattered upon the floor. And nearly all the pleasure of the day would be debased. Nearly, but not all.

Until the dreadful morning came when Tom Molyneaux found his legget gone.

It was such a fresh, silvery morning, as if the Plain had been dipped in some clear spring-fed pool and then laid to dry in the sun's strengthening warmth. Not a morning for disaster, and Mr. Spreadbury felt cheated as he hurried from the kitchen at Tom Molyneaux's cry.

" 'Twas here! I left 'n here!" He stared, perplexed, at the spot where the legget had been as if it would materialize under his gaze. His shears lay tucked beneath the ladder, with his mallet and hooks and the fat roll of orange binder-twine. But the legget was gone.

"Is it on the roof? Perhaps you left it on the roof." Mr. Spreadbury backed quickly from the ladder foot, staring upward, his eyes yearning for the square, studded board. But it was not there.

"Did you—perhaps you took it home?" Mr. Spreadbury clasped his hands in mute supplication and then shook his head violently at Tom Molyneaux's look of scorn. "No—no, of course not, you wouldn't do that."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" 'Twas here." Tom Molyneaux pointed to the ground, insisting. "Just as I alus leave 'n."

And then Mr. Spreadbury, striving against the disintegration of his contented morning, said a very foolish thing:

"I'll ask my wife. Perhaps she's seen it!"

A slow dark rage suffused Tom Molyneaux's face. He swiveled his pale eyes to stare at Mr. Spreadbury.

"The woman—her took 'n!"

"Oh, no! No—no—no!" Mr. Spreadbury raised up and down on his toes in his gross anxiety. "Mrs. Spreadbury wouldn't do a thing like that—please, you must believe me."

But Tom Molyneaux stood, neck thrust forward, head weaving, his pale and angry eyes casting about the garden like some chase-thinned hound.

Above the wattle fence the very finest of smoke columns penciled the sky. With a grunt, he loped across the grass, Mr. Spreadbury pattering in distress behind him.

The bonfire was a blackened, dismal thing, but some tiny wayward draught must have sought out an ember, betraying the faint life in it.

Distractedly, Tom Molyneaux thrust at it with the old fork until, with a moan, he fell on his knees. For buried at the heart lay the charred remains of the legget.

He snatched it to him, cradling it in disbelief.

"Yourn missus, yourn missus done it!" he groaned. "Yourn missus burned me legget!"

But Mr. Spreadbury was staring past him, his mouth hanging open. "She's burned my pipe, my favorite pipe!" The words dribbled from his slack lips as he bent for the bare bones of the old briar. "Why should she do that? She knows I loved it!" And answered his own question.

"Her's wicked, wicked. A wicked woman." Tom Molyneaux rose, muttering, casting the now useless tool down, his gaze after it. "Her'll destroy us. Her's evil."

Mr. Spreadbury found he was trembling. Revenge. Alice had deliberately taken those two cherished articles and destroyed them. It was a terrible, terrible thing she had done. They were not pieces of wood, they were molded for work and pleasure, patinaed by the satisfaction they had given, to be rewarded with honor and acclaim. Not to be burned at the stake. For Tom Molyneaux, his tools were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than that—they were his livelihood, an extension even of himself, his skill.

The trembling mutated to a shudder. Tom Molyneaux was still and silent, but his lips were working about unheard words, his long hands clenching and unclenching by his sides. Mr. Spreadbury could not move, although he would very much have liked to. How often in his life he had read of "impending doom," marking it as a vague and blanketing phrase, favored by indolent authors. Now he knew absolutely and exactly what it meant. Nothing had changed outwardly about him: the gentle blue of the sky, the golden-patched roof, the glorious outpourings of the thrush in the walnut tree, the hoarse barking of the Merediths' old dog down the lane. Yet into it all, soaking slowly like a dark stain, was impending doom.

He was helpless. He could feel whatever strength of mind he'd ever had drain from him, sucked out by the terrible will of the man beside him. He became a shell, a gourd, a puppet. Alice's action had delivered him into Tom Molyneaux's huge, angled hands, because to defend her would be to condone and thus be condemned by him.

Condemn. That was a strange word to be using, Mr. Spreadbury thought miserably, yet that was the only description he could think of as he looked into Tom Molyneaux's black angry face. The face of the hanging judge. Alice was condemned but he did not know how.

Yet nothing changed. There were no thunderbolts, no ravens croaking portents, no trees flowering out of season. Tom Molyneaux continued to work regularly and steadily, and if he became even more monosyllabic Mr. Spreadbury did not blame him. Indeed, the weight of his own loss leadened his heart and thoughts so that he, too, found conversation difficult. That pipe had been more than a conveyor of smoke. It had been his first pipe, a present from his father, the companion of his youth and maturity, his comfort in times of stress and anxiety, the smooth, polished bowl a reassurance to his hand when times were trying. It had been a friend, a comforter, a companion. And Alice, knowing that, had destroyed it, deliberately and malevolently.

Like a poison, his resentment festered beneath the surface of his good temper, erupting in little pustules of irritability and impatience. Mrs. Spreadbury did not like it, not one little bit, but it was as if her wicked action had armored him against her vituperation, emboldening him. As if he might shelter beneath the bitter black shadow of Tom Molyneaux's resentment. He no longer attempted to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

protect the garden, he even once wore his Wellington boots in the kitchen. There was a subtle shifting of power, so slight as to be almost imperceptible. But for Mr. Spreadbury, it was heady stuff.

It was on the second Friday in April that Mrs. Spreadbury developed a nasty cold. By market day she had taken to her bed and Mr. Spreadbury was ordered to proceed to Salisbury alone.

"No need to stay to lunch," Mrs. Spreadbury instructed thickly. "You come straight back here." She glared at him, her little tip-tilted nose all red and shiny, her grey hair spindly from the pillow, her fingers, like paws, gripping the edge of the sheet to her chin. And Mr. Spreadbury wondered yet again, in quiet astonishment, that he could ever have found her desirable.

Not that it really mattered, because when he returned at dusk, disobedient and more than a little inebriated after a lengthy and jolly lunch with the rakish Mr. Crosswell from the office, she was not there.

With the concentration of the not-quite-sober, Mr. Spreadbury searched every room and cupboard, the garden, and the shed not once, not twice, but three times. She was not there, she was not anywhere at all.

But Tom Molyneaux said, coming out from the oil-lit interior of his hut:

"She be there. She be there when I left. I seed her."

"I can't understand it, it's so unlike her." Mr. Spreadbury stood in a maze of bemusement and Wadsworths. "Perhaps—the police. Perhaps I should tell the police—"

Tom Molyneaux cracked the joints of his long fingers, staring out across the dim field, lace-edged by the hawthorns' black branches.

"Her'll be angry. Her's tricking again. Wants to torment, like with the pipe. You tell police and her'll flay you." He moved his foot as something scampered past them from beneath the hut. "Police don't care. Her's adult."

"But it's so unlike her, don't you see? She's never done such a thing in her life!" Up and down Mr. Spreadbury went on his toes, in an ecstasy of anxiety. "Perhaps she became very ill—lost her memory—went outside—"

"I'd've seen her. Never moved from the garden all day. Her'd be brought back—wandering in her nightdress. No, you leave her be. You just wait."

He stared out across the night-black fields, disinterested now, and Mr. Spreadbury hesitated in an agony of indecision, the lunch fumes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blurring his judgment. Perhaps if he waited until the morning—Yes, he'd wait until the morning. And then, when Alice returned, he'd show that he'd taken it all quite calmly, her little tormenting ruse hadn't worked at all. Why, even her cold had probably been false! He began to feel quite indignant. She was trying to humiliate him again, upset him. She was being very unkind, very unkind indeed. She'd have him running about all over the county and then blame him for the furor.

"Very well." Mr. Spreadbury puffed out his chest. "Very well. I'll wait and see. Thank you. Thank you, Tom. Goodnight to you."

He walked carefully away from the hut, his steps rustling through the cool grass. Then he stopped. Yet the rustling went on, as if he were not alone, as if other things might be escorting him back to April Cottage. His heart gave a little nervous leap. He stumbled into a half run, his foot touching something that bounded sharply from his path, so that he was quite out of breath with agitation by the time he reached the cottage.

He slept uneasily that night, his head aching. Above him, there was a scratching and a squealing and a quarreling, a scampering such as he'd never heard in the cottage before. It was a good thing, he thought through the little hammers in his brain, that Alice was not there to hear. She'd have had him up in the attic in no time at all. He'd tell Tom Molyneaux in the morning. Tom would know what to do.

"They'll not stay. 'Tis the spring. They'll settle sooner, you just see."

"But my wife—she'll have a fit! When she comes back from—wherever she is." Mr. Spreadbury's voice faded off and Tom Molyneaux showed his yellowish, infrequent teeth.

"Then 'tis lucky her's away. Count yer blessings, that's what I'd say." And he began to whistle, something Mr. Spreadbury had never heard him do before.

But Mrs. Spreadbury never did come back, and somehow, as the days slid comfortably and enjoyably by, Mr. Spreadbury felt less and less inclined to go to the police. After all, if Alice wished to leave home it was really no one's business but hers. And the longer he postponed it, the more curious a complaint might seem. Certainly no one inquired for her, no one missed her at all. Least of all Mr. Spreadbury himself.

And Tom Molyneaux was quite right, the rats didn't stay long.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just a few weeks. But there must have been quite a dust up because for quite some time there was a most curious and unpleasant smell, a sweet sour pungent smell that stirred long-buried memories of the war.

"Very savage, rats is," Tom Molyneaux volunteered when consulted. "Little murderers—cannibals, too."

Mr. Spreadbury didn't bother to take the mugs of tea to the shed any longer. They sat at the kitchen table instead. He took to wearing his old grey cardigan whenever he wanted, and he even began to smoke in the lovely solitude of the bed.

That summer no one stopped to photograph the garden of April Cottage. Like lurking miscreants, the couch grass, the ground elder, and the convolvulus slunk back. But Mr. Spreadbury didn't mind at all. He thought it all looked very wild and typically English.

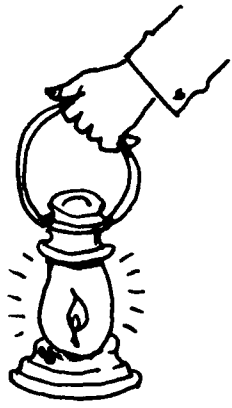
When at last Tom Molyneaux was done, they stood together on the daisy-dotted lawn and Mr. Spreadbury said in quiet satisfaction:

"Well, Tom, that's a splendid job done. It's good to know I shan't have to have it touched again in my lifetime."

Beside him, Tom Molyneaux nodded, a long slow smile creasing the rough dark skin of his face, and if Mr. Spreadbury had been attending he might have found exceedingly curious the expression of acute satisfaction that constituted that smile.

"No, you'll not have to touch it. 'Tis good and thick now. That'd quite spoil it. You want anything, you ask Tom. 'Tis Tom's thatch now."

"Oh, I will, I will. I don't know what I'd have done without you, Tom." And, beaming, Mr. Spreadbury led the way indoors for tea.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the first Rachel Hennings short story by

JON L. BREEN

She was sure she could get the pristine copy of the 1941 first edition of Simon the Otter *for less than fifteen hundred dollars, Rachel told Hermione Swan. "If you can, you'll have a generous bonus," Hermione promised her.*

Book-shop owner Rachel Hennings is the central character in The Gathering Place *(Walker, 1984) by our former book reviewer, Jon L. Breen. Jon's other novel-series character, race-track announcer Jerry Brogan* (Listen for the Click), *has a new adventure just out from Walker,* Triple Crown. *Go for it . . .*

A PIECE OF THE AUCTION

by JON L. BREEN

The day of the *Simon the Otter* murder marked a first in Rachel Hennings' brief career as a used-book dealer. Not her first murder, but her first auction.

Hermione Swan, an attractive woman of about fifty, had been a regular customer at Vermilion's Book Shop on Santa Monica Boulevard since Rachel had started running it after the death of her uncle, Oscar Vermilion. One afternoon, Hermione leaned across the desk at the front of the shop and said with a confidential air, "Rachel, I want you to acquire a copy of *Simon the Otter* for me."

Rachel had a rather nice copy of the famous children's book she had priced at a modest $7.50 and started to say so, but Hermione cut her off by laying an expensively printed auction catalogue on the desk. "Not just any copy—one particular one. It has great sentimental value for me. It originally belonged to my father."

Rachel opened the catalogue. Judging by its glossiness, the items

© *1986 by Jon L. Breen.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in this dispersal of the late Foster Donnelly's children's-book collection were not going to come cheap. When she paused to admire a reproduced title page of one of the early Oz books, Hermione prompted impatiently, "It's Lot Number One Eighty-three."

Rachel flipped the pages. Lot #183 was described as a pristine copy of the 1941 first edition of *Simon the Otter*, first of the dozen-book series by Griswold Mack, inscribed by the author to his friend Edsel Swan.

"Hermione, you want me to represent you at this auction?"

"If you will."

"I'd love to, but I'm still pretty new to this business. I've never even been to a book auction before. Don't you want to go yourself?"

"I have my reasons not to. But I do want that book, Rachel."

"How did it happen to leave your father's collection in the first place?"

Hermione sniffed. Rachel thought she was going to be told, reasonably enough, that it was none of her business, but Hermione decided to answer. "I gave Foster Donnelly the book after my father's death. He was a good friend of my father's and a good friend of mine. I was sure when Foster died I could get it back from his heirs, but they're a mercenary bunch and didn't see it that way. Frankly, the Donnelly kids have always hated me. They thought I broke up their parents' marriage, which was patently ridiculous."

Rachel suppressed a smile. "Their charge or the marriage?"

"Both. That's one reason I don't want to be seen at the auction. If they knew I was bidding, they might do something to run up the price just to soak me. I wouldn't put it past them."

"Hermione, if you want me to go, I'll be glad to go. But I can't promise to represent you as well as someone with more experience could. How much are you willing to spend for the book?"

"You may go as high as fifteen hundred."

"Fifteen hundred? Hermione, it can't be worth more than two hundred."

"I want the book. That's all there is to it. After all, it's my book really. Edsel Swan was famous as a collector, but he was a father first and he thought books were meant to be read, by children. Of course, he impressed on me their value and he knew I'd be very careful. That copy of *Simon the Otter* is my book, and if it takes fifteen hundred to buy it back, fifteen hundred it must be."

"I'm sure I can get it for less than that," Rachel said rashly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If you can, you'll have a generous bonus. Shall we talk about your fee?"

"Why don't we wait until after the auction?" Rachel said. "Then you can see if I've done the job or not." Truthfully, she had no idea what to charge.

Rachel sat in the crowded auction room the next day fingering her catalogue anxiously, waiting for the offering of Lot #183. She continued to doubt, naively perhaps, that this mixed crowd of book collectors, having spiritedly bid up numerous Tom Swifts and Big Little Books, along with some priceless volumes by Lewis Carroll and Kenneth Grahame, could have much money or enthusiasm left by the time Simon came swimming into view. A pale and plump-faced young man she had identified as the principal heir of Foster Donnelly (and thus one of Hermione's imagined enemies) all but licked his chops at the high prices that had already fallen under the auctioneer's gavel.

Once #183 was out of the way, Rachel hoped to have some fun as a spectator—maybe even as a bidder on her own if she could get the Mack title cheaply enough to gain that promised bonus.

"Sold to Mr. Gerberton!" the auctioneer shouted not for the first time that afternoon. "And I think you got a bargain, sir." Mervyn Gerberton, a frail-looking elderly man in a brightly checkered sports jacket, allowed one corner of his tight mouth to turn up slightly. He sat so motionless Rachel wondered how they could tell he was bidding at all.

"That brings us to Lot One Eighty-three, a splendid item for all you Griswold Mack fanatics. It's *Simon the Otter*, a pristine copy of the nineteen forty-one first edition published by Dahlman and Company. This copy was previously in the collection of Edsel Swan, that fabled collector, and is inscribed to Swan by Griswold Mack, the inscription dated May eight, nineteen forty-two. It's probably the best inscribed copy ever offered at auction or any other way, certainly the best *I've* ever seen. No child has had his sticky fingers on this one, you can bet on that."

Rachel smiled to herself. There wasn't a person in the room under voting age and she, at twenty-five, was far younger than most. There were numerous elderly ladies, including one hiding her face behind a heavy mourning veil, and a large supply of bright-eyed old men. She was convinced any of these children's-book collectors in truth hated children, who were notoriously hard on books.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Who will open the bidding at fifty dollars? Do I hear fifty?"

Rachel held her breath through the silence. She was sure it was uncool auction behavior to jump in too fast.

"Come, come, ladies and gentlemen. This is an exquisite item by one of the greatest author-illustrators of them all. Do I hear forty-five?"

"Forty-five," said a bored-sounding voice belonging to Alicia Hardwager, an overdressed society woman of indeterminate middle age seated in the front row.

"I have forty-five from Mrs. Hardwager. Who will make it fifty? Come, come, you Simonites. This is insulting to the little lad. There, I have fifty!"

One of the auctioneer's side men had picked up a bid somewhere, but Rachel wasn't sure where. It must have been Mr. Gerberton again.

"Fifty-five," said Mrs. Hardwager in a dealing-with-the-servants voice.

"Sixty," Rachel offered, trying to sound as blasé as the bejeweled matron, who turned to give her a withering look.

"Thank you, Ms. Hennings," said the auctioneer. "And wouldn't it look nice in the window of Vermilion's?"

Rachel smiled nervously, wishing he hadn't called her by name.

As the bidding went on, with pauses and drags allowed but the gavel never permitted to fall, it became clearer that Mr. Gerberton was indeed in the bidding, as one side man was concentrating all his attention on him. Slowly, things began to heat up. The other two bidders seemed as determined to have the book as Rachel was herself, and when Mrs. Hardwager arrived at a bid of two hundred dollars a new voice entered the picture. A grey-haired man-of-distinction type in the back row raised it to $225.00.

"This is more like it!" the auctioneer exclaimed. "May I have two fifty?"

"Two fifty," said Rachel.

"Two seventy-five," said Mrs. Hardwager, no longer sounding successfully bored.

"Three hundred," said the man in the back.

Hoping to break the tension and get the book, Rachel tried a bigger raise. "Four hundred dollars!"

This only made things worse. The bids kept climbing, from Mrs. Hardwager, from Mr. Gerberton, from the unknown executive. Rachel didn't enter a bid again until the price had reached $850.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The non-participating collectors in the room were baffled and excited. Why was this book worth so much—four times what anyone would have expected it to bring? Rachel's customer had known she might have to go unusually high to get the book. But was $1500 high enough? If only Rachel could consult Hermione for permission to go higher still.

Mr. Gerberton was first to hit the four-digit barrier, but Mrs. Hardwager quickly raised to $1050. The grey-haired man went to $1100 and Rachel in turn offered $1150. Subsequent bids pushed it up to $1450, and Rachel, her heart in her throat, bid her stated limit of $1500. The bidding seemed to stop and hang there for a moment, as if the competitors were asking themselves what they were doing, but soon Mrs. Hardwager went to $1550. Impulsively, Rachel bid $1600, in effect putting up her own hundred for a one-sixteenth interest in this apparently hot item. The grey-haired man went to $1650, and Rachel, half relieved and half disappointed, came to her senses and dropped out. Both Mr. Gerberton and Mrs. Hardwager offered final volleys, but the grey-haired man finally had the book for an astounding $2,000, about ten times its reputed value.

"Do you know who he is?" Rachel whispered to the Hardy Boys collector on her left.

"Roger Masterman. Vice-president of Penzo Foods. Remember the Penzo Mule they used to have on all their cola bottles? That was an advertising classic. They never should have let that mule go."

"Does he always turn up at these auctions?"

"I've never seen him at one, and I come to 'em all. I only know him because I'm in the junk-food trade myself."

"Any idea why—?"

"Pardon me, Miss, but they're putting up that first of *The Tower Treasure*. I've been waitin' for this all day."

Rachel, feeling a sense of letdown, didn't stay for the rest of the auction. She had to report to Hermione Swan that evening and rather dreaded it. As she drove back toward Vermilion's, though, a nagging mystery was shoving aside her failure to acquire the book. Why such a big price? Why was an executive from Penzo Foods, not someone known as a book collector, paying so much for *Simon the Otter?* Why were the other bidders joining with him so enthusiastically to run the price up?

An idea came to her suddenly—just a hypothesis, but enough to compel her to stop at a local public library to see what she could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

find out about those other two bidders before she returned to Vermilion's.

Later, over dinner in her apartment above the old book shop, she put on the radio news and heard an item that stopped her in midbite. Roger Masterman of the Penzo Foods Company had been found shot to death that afternoon in an alley near the auction house and his unidentified assailant was being sought by Los Angeles police. Rachel dropped her fork and reached for the phone. What she had in mind was too off-the-wall to offer to a stranger, but she was fortunate in having a friend in the LAPD.

To reach Detective Manuel Gonzales, Rachel had to suggest her purpose was personal rather than police business. Manny sounded almost disappointed when he learned Rachel wanted to talk about a case, even his case, rather than a resumption of their romantic relationship.

"No, Rachel, we don't have a lead. If you were at that auction, though, we definitely want to ask you some questions."

"Can you come to the shop?"

"Sure."

"I think I have an idea, Manny, but I'd like to have you here."

"Will you explain your idea or do you want to play Nancy Drew and keep it a secret?"

Rachel explained as fully as she could.

As soon as her customer walked through the door of the book shop, Rachel said, "I'm sorry I couldn't get the book, Hermione, but I really didn't have a chance."

"It's all right, Rachel. Don't worry about it. You didn't reveal to anyone I was your client, did you?"

"No, of course not."

"Good."

Rachel said carefully, "I don't know if you heard, Hermione, but Roger Masterman, the man who bought the book, was murdered after the auction."

"Was he really? How very strange. Did they say what happened to the book?"

"I doubt they knew anything about the book. Why was that copy of *Simon the Otter* so valuable, Hermione?"

"I told you, it was valuable to me because it was one of the prizes of my father's collection. It had great sentimental value. I treasured

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that book as a child. My fingers weren't sticky, I can tell you that. I didn't mind a friend of his like Foster Donnelly having it, but to have it sold at auction to just anyone—"

"Hermione, if you'll forgive me, there has to be more to it than that. There were three other people bidding for the book, bidding it much higher than it was worth, and the man who got it was murdered. They must have known something special about that book. And you must have known something, too."

"I certainly did not. I'm just trying to reassemble my father's collection."

Rachel sighed. "Okay. But I have a theory of my own, one that occurred to me even before the murder. The dead man worked for Penzo Foods. They make all kinds of products besides Penzo itself—cereal, candy bars, potato chips—but Penzo is their mainstay."

"Dreadful stuff—I can't stand it. Of course, I'm not fond of cola drinks generally, so I'm no judge."

"I got to thinking this afternoon after I left the auction. Maybe the Penzo Company was looking for a new animated character to appear in their television ads. For years they had the Penzo Mule, who was very successful. But when they went to the Penzo Rabbit, it was a flop, remember? Then they tried the Penzo Bear and the Penzo Dalmatian, who didn't catch on, either. They could have gone back to the mule, but they were probably too stubborn to admit defeat. What if they were looking for a new animal and bought the rights to Griswold Mack's books from the Mack estate? Simon the Otter would be a great advertising personality for them, sell a lot of fizzy drinks."

"Not to me."

Ignoring her, Rachel continued, "The company would naturally keep their new campaign a secret until they were ready to unveil it. Anybody who *did* know about it might foresee a great new surge of interest in Mack's work—and rising prices for Mack first editions. Who would be in a position to know? Not the general run of children's-book collectors. And probably not the Donnelly heirs. But I looked up Mervyn Gerberton in *Who's Who in America* this afternoon and learned he used to be on the Penzo board of directors, so he might have a pipeline of confidential information."

Hermione began to show some interest. "Is that so? What about Alicia Hardwager?"

"One of her sons works for the advertising agency that handles

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Penzo account. The third bidder, of course, was a Penzo vice-president."

Hermione Swan nodded. "So that's why the bid was so high. If only I'd known."

"You must have known. Otherwise why would you have instructed me to go as high as fifteen hundred?"

"I just wanted to be sure."

"You don't have a Penzo connection, but you could have heard from the Griswold Mack heirs. And if the book was worth so much to you, why aren't you more upset about not getting it?"

Hermione decided to become indignant. "Rachel, I didn't hire you to browbeat me! I like your little shop and I liked your uncle, Oscar Vermilion, and I thought I could help you out by using you as my agent at the book auction. I should have gone myself!"

"You did go yourself."

"What?"

"You sent me as a representative, but you went, too—heavily disguised, I'm sure, so I and none of your collecting acquaintances would recognize you. You were the elderly lady with the veil, weren't you? If I should fail to buy the book for you, you were ready to take any steps necessary to get it, including following the man who bought it, shooting him to death, and stealing the book."

"That's absurd, Rachel!"

"Maybe and maybe not."

"You have no evidence."

"That book could be evidence if it's in your house. So could the veil. Or the gun. Did you have time to dispose of them before you came here? The police could have a search warrant ready before you have time to get home. Couldn't they, Manny?"

"Sure could," said a masculine voice. A plainclothes detective appeared from behind a shelf of mystery novels.

"You've suspected me all along?" said Hermione.

"Only a little," Rachel told her, "but I've learned from experience that it pays to be careful. I wasn't sure until you made the reference to sticky fingers a few minutes ago. You knew I'd understand the allusion, but I didn't tell you the auctioneer's crack about sticky fingers. How did you know it if you weren't there?"

"It's a natural allusion when you talk about children and books."

"Maybe. But then you asked me about Alicia Hardwager. How did you know she was one of the other bidders? I never mentioned her name."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hermione said slowly, "My interest had nothing to do with the Penzo contract, Rachel. I knew about it, of course, but that was just a complicating factor."

"You had another reason for wanting the book?"

"Griswold Mack had a somewhat pleasantly depraved sense of humor, an appreciation of rude wit quite out of line with his status as a children's-book author. When he inscribed all his Simon the Otter books to my father, he was having a subtle joke that I learned about too late and my father never did. All the twelve inscriptions, read in sequence, made up a rather crude message—what your generation might call a gross-out, definitely not for children. But only someone who could put two or more books together could suspect it was there. I have my father's inscribed copies of every Simon the Otter book except the first one, and I discovered the continuing pattern only after I gave that one to Foster Donnelly.

"Don't ever fall in love, Rachel, it's nothing but misery. I immediately realized that as a set, these books would be priceless—infinitely more valuable than they are individually. Acquiring that book could have been worth fifty to a hundred thousand dollars to me. My father was a wealthy man, but I've been dipping into the capital he left me for years."

She turned to Manny Gonzales. "Well, are you going to read me my rights or something, young man?"

"Then you did do it, Hermione?" said Rachel.

"I admit to nothing. I can explain everything—the book, the gun, the veil, everything. And I have a very good lawyer. May I call him, my dear?"

"Be my guest," Rachel told her.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions, including change of address, should be sent to P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"Casey, this is me," Distant Listener said.

"It sure is."

"I can't let them do this to us," the caller told the disc jockey. "Tell them for me, please. The Dawn Patrol must continue."

"Sorry, D.L. It's a closed book. We finish at the end of August. Clement Foy has spoken."

"Tell Mr. Foy to change his mind."

"He won't." Suddenly the idea of sending this looney to plague the program director seemed sweet. "Why not tell him yourself?" Casey Broad suggested. "You can get him here in the daytime . . ."

NEVER LEAVE ME, DAWN PATROL

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Whispering across the innocent summer night, the Dawn Patrol reached out from radio station CBAY and touched lonely people wherever they lay listening. Casey Broad gossiped reassuringly between passages of recorded music, told the time, predicted tomorrow's weather, identified a listener whose request had prompted the choice of the next record. Frequently, he drew on his experience to flesh out a lifeless title.

"Long after you and I are planted beside the petunias in Baytown Memorial Park," Broad murmured close to the microphone, "people will be getting transfusions of energy from the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra playing 'I'll Take Tallulah.' The confident young vocalist is F. Sinatra. And when the band comes on near the end like the

© 1986 by William Bankier.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Seventh Cavalry, listen to those two vindictive trumpets chasing each other—Mr. Ziggy Elman and Mr. Chuck Peterson."

Halfway through the record, a light flickered on the wall behind the console. Broad lifted the telephone. "Casey Broad's Dawn Patrol, state your name and business." As he spoke, he let the chair swivel through ninety degrees, leaned back, and admired his reflection in dark glass—shirt three buttons open, sleeves rolled high, the mahogany glow of summer lending extra brilliance to teeth and eyes.

"Aren't you going a little heavy on the jazz, my son?" The caller was Clement Foy, program director, Casey Broad's immediate boss.

"It's an up-tempo vocal, Clem. What are you doing up at this hour of the morning?"

"Uneasy lies the head that makes the decisions, Case."

"In other words, you're drunk."

"I had dinner and a discussion with management this evening. He's leaving it up to me. All I have to do is make the station show a profit."

Broad was keeping a professional eye on the Dorsey record. As it came to an end, he switched on the other turntable and held the cued-up record with a fingertip while the table revolved beneath it. When "Tallulah" ran out, he quickly faded its volume control, released the other record, and faded it up, a very smooth segue into Mancini strings and brass.

"So it looks as though the Dawn Patrol," Foy continued, "will have to go. We've given the program almost two years and the verdict is in. A town this size cannot support an all-night radio show." The executive cleared his throat. "No reflection on you, my son."

"Does this mean I can do Broadly Speaking?" Broad had been angling to get off the night shift anyway. He wanted to try his new project, an hour in the early evening starting with a verbal essay by himself on some topical subject followed by telephone calls from involved listeners.

"Depends on whether we can get a sponsor. I like it, it's cheap." Foy coughed again, a sure sign that he had just heard what he had said. "No reflection on your idea."

An hour later, at half past two, Broad got to the letter. "Another communication in the mail today from Distant Listener. Are you out there, my friend? I suspect you are. As you say, and I quote, 'I am now ready to put my damaged soul to the test. Is it strong enough after six months of healing to resist exposure to the most poignant

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ballad ever recorded? Let's find out. Play it, Casey. Play Frankie Laine's recording of 'We'll Be Together Again.' "

Broad let the record go. He sat back and closed his eyes as Laine's voice sketched in the brief verse before sliding into the chorus ("No tears, no fears, remember there's always tomorrow—"). The classic had been recorded before the man became a millionaire with "Mule Train" and "Jezebel." This was the sensitive, husky voice at its jazz-singing best.

The letters had been coming for months, each as anonymous as this one. No return address on them, no signature, typed badly on an old machine with a dead ribbon. Broad crumpled the sheet of paper and clonged it into the metal bin. Distant Listener had lost a close companion several months ago. His first message had made it clear that the Dawn Patrol was the only thing standing between him and the pill bottle or the gas oven. Apparently he worked somewhere and could make it through the day. Nights were something else.

Having been sentenced nearly two years ago to the solitude of CBAY in the small hours, Casey Broad knew what it was to face four A.M. with the heart barely ticking over, the stomach refusing to accept any more coffee. He could sympathize with anybody taking on the night.

The record came to an end. "You chose a good one, my friend," he said into the microphone. "You always do. Your life may be damaged but your taste in music is healthy." Earlier requests had included a clarinet spectacular by Buddy de Franco on "Lover Man," and Red Norvo playing "Ghost of a Chance"—always something to get inside you. "Come around sometime and say hello—that is, if you don't live too far away." The D.J. was musing on an open microphone, leaving stretches of dead air. At this hour, what did it matter? "But how distant can you be, tuned into CBAY's two hundred and fifty watts? Twenty-five miles maximum? Unless you're a space visitor aboard a UFO hovering somewhere overhead." Broad allowed himself a whimper. "It's getting to me, boys and girls. Quick, nurse—the sedative!"

When Scott Culligan showed up at six o'clock for his morning show, damp-haired and smelling of Aqua Velva, Broad was playing uninterrupted music, the expression in his eyes only half human.

"Fantastic morning out there," Culligan enthused as he cued-up his theme. "Wait till you smell the breeze off the bay."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What with? I ate my nose."

The morning man gave his colleague a glance. "When's your vacation?"

"Don't worry, Scotty. Foy rang me last night. They're going to cancel the Dawn Patrol."

"Not a day too soon."

The shifts changed without the usual banter between the two disc jockeys. Broad gathered his records and humped them funereally down the hall to the library, pursued by the demon cheer of Scott Culligan greeting his audience over the brassy fanfare of "It's a Lovely Day Today": "Wakey-wakey, Baytown—time to smell the coffee and skate on out into a super-duper morning. This is Mrs. Culligan's little boy Scotty with all the news and weather and traffic reports from the—"

Broad slammed the door of the library to cut the unbearable sound. Pat Herbert turned from a cabinet where he was filing records. "Sorry, Pat," Broad said. "I didn't expect you to be in so early."

"It's my best time to get some work done. When Maggie's here, she wants to talk."

"Maggie doesn't appreciate her luck, having you living around the corner."

"I like to help." Balding, thin, with studious eyes behind round glasses, Pat Herbert looked more like a vicar than a record librarian. He tucked discs away as he spoke. "Besides, I organized this system when the station opened. And the part-time pay comes in handy."

Broad placed his records on a table. The window was open. He went to it and leaned head and shoulders outside, breathing deeply. It was, as Culligan had told him, a glorious morning. His night-depression was lifting.

"Mind you," Herbert nattered on, "Maggie will have to do without me when I go to visit Peggy in Toronto."

"How does your sister like the big city?"

"Loves it. Landed a job working a word processor. She's there to stay."

Broad left the station and walked around the corner to the Paragon Cafe, where he consumed orange juice, bacon and eggs, toast and coffee. As usual, Tony the boss would not let him pay. From time to time, Broad mentioned the Paragon on the air and Tony seemed to feel the references were worth something. A Montrealer who came to Baytown after the war and opened his restaurant, Tony thought

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Dawn Patrol was big league. "You're what this town needs, Casey. Keep up the good work."

Today, Broad walked the slow, scenic route home. He felt grainy behind the eyes—sleep would come easily—but he was putting off the moment when he would go unconscious. He wandered along Pinnacle Street, past the big house where Pat Herbert lived, turned left at the Baytown Public Library, and climbed the hill to the high-school campus. Five weeks into summer vacation, the dusty playing field was sprouting a sparse nap of grass. Beyond the school, on Queen Street, the road was dug up and barricaded, evidence of the current town project, replacing natural-gas pipes. The number of men drawing wages made Broad think that a municipal election must be on the way. A possible subject for Broadly Speaking?

He arrived at the apartment just as Leonora was preparing to leave for work. "You didn't call," she said. "I had to assume you went to the Paragon."

"Sorry," he said. They met in the middle of the kitchen. She raised her hand and all the contact he could manage at the moment was his palm against hers. "I forgot there were telephones."

"I have to go." In the doorway, she turned. "We see so little of each other."

"That will change. Foy says the Dawn Patrol is coming off."

"Thank God. Forgive me, Case, I know you put a lot into the program, but—"

"Don't apologize. I'm looking forward to rejoining the human race."

Broad undressed to his underwear, then lay on top of the bed recently vacated by Leonora Lacey. He slept deeply for an hour, drifting upward after that into the state of semi-awareness during which ideas and understandings washed over him, suggesting that life was really a lot simpler than it seemed when he was awake.

He would ask Leonora to marry him. He imagined her at her desk in the public library. She left it and moved gracefully to the microphone at CBAY from where she delivered her nightly half hour of poetry readings against a background of semi-classical music. Broad saw himself arriving to take over, as he did each evening at midnight, and was surprised to discover on this occasion that while the David Rose orchestra played "Our Waltz," Leonora was reading "Casey at the Bat" with dramatic intensity. Miss McAvoy, Baytown's chief librarian, appeared in the dream and spoke critically of her young assistant because of her extracurricular activities at CBAY.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then young Casey Broad, only seven years old and given access to the adult library for the first time, approached the desk and set down his chosen book. It was *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Miss McAvoy glanced from the title to the little boy wearing shorts and knee-socks and a loose shirt that revealed his chicken chest. She smiled an inner smile as she stamped the due-date inside the book's cover.

"It's official," Clement Foy told Broad that afternoon at four-thirty when he arrived at the station to look at his mail and select his music for the night's program. "The Dawn Patrol comes crashing to the ground at the end of August." Foy looked like a star of silent movies, with his hair parted in the middle, his narrow moustache, and his wasp-waisted, double-breasted jacket with shoulders a yard wide. "You may as well announce it tonight."

"For this relief, much thanks," Broad said.

Foy was collecting microphones and loudspeakers to take to the Masonic Hall, where his orchestra was playing that evening. The Clem Foy Five worked various gigs around the county and, being program director, the leader saw no reason to ask anyone whether he could use CBAY equipment or not. His own instrument was the clarinet, which he could play almost like Artie Shaw for at least one chorus of most numbers.

"And not so much jazz, my son," Foy advised. "Think less of your own enjoyment and more of your audience."

Confirmation of his release from the night shift in a few weeks' time lent energy to Broad's leg muscles. He ran the stairs to the record library two at a time. Maggie came into the room as he was looking at his mail.

"Where were you last night?" she said. Maggie was chunky as a football linebacker but attractive, with her long blonde hair brushed loose and only the eyes made up in her otherwise innocent face. She had come down from Toronto following Scott Culligan when he moved from the big city two years ago to take over the morning show. Their relationship had since terminated but Maggie was enjoying the Baytown pace, so she stayed on in her room upstairs over the Paragon Cafe. Casey Broad had seen the inside of that room only once. He and Leonora were still talking about it.

"I was here," Broad said, searching for Lionel Hampton's "Stardust," which had invaded his mind while he was sleeping. "Where were you?"

"Tuned you in about half past three. You played four sides without

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a word. If we're going to run uninterrupted music, we may as well play tapes from the transmitter."

"When did you take over Clem Foy's job?"

"That bastard. The sooner we get rid of him, the better."

After preparing his program, the night D.J. gave himself a rest by going to a movie. When he came out, he dined alone at the new rib-house next door to the Coronet Hotel, then wandered up Front Street accepting and dispensing greetings like the star you are when you work for a small-town radio station.

It was half past eleven and Leonora's opening theme music was playing when he climbed the stairs and peered through the triple glass into the control room. She put a finger to her lips—she was about to deliver her standard opening. Fading Rachmaninoff, she spoke softly, eyes closed, Tennyson's lines from "The Lotus-Eaters" long since memorized:

"There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass . . ."

Broad let himself into the room after she had read her first poem and had released a turntableful of "Pavane for a Dead Princess." "You're in good voice tonight," he said, kissing the warm moist curve of her neck.

"I always read well when I'm cheesed off."

"Bad day at the library?"

"Bad life at Casey Broad's apartment."

"Didn't I promise you I'm coming off nights? Foy made it official today."

"Will that be enough to change us?"

He had no answer, so he kissed her again. The sad music ended—Leonora opened the microphone and began reading more sad words. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,/ old Time is still aflying . . ."

Half an hour later, with Leonora gone home and his own program two records along, Broad broke his big news to the listening audience.

"It's been a happy experience for me," he concluded, telling only part of the truth, "and I hope you dear hearts and gentle people have enjoyed it, too. But all good things must come to an end."

Two days later, the letter from Distant Listener arrived in Broad's pigeonhole. "I can't accept it, Casey," it read in part. "What am I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to do? I used to have a complete life. I had companionship. Now I'm alone. Do you go to bed with somebody else in the house? People were never meant to make it through the night on their own. I had begun cracking up before I started listening to the Dawn Patrol. Your program saved me. I listen to your voice and your music and I drift off—and if I come awake, you're still there. You can't leave me now."

Since there was no request in it for a record, Broad threw the letter away, saying nothing about it to anybody. Four nights later, the telephone call came through at one-thirty in the morning. The voice was metallic, echoing, so heavily disguised Broad couldn't have said later whether he had been listening to a man or a woman.

"Casey, this is me."

"It sure is." Broad faded one record, let another go.

"You never referred to my letter. After all the times I've been writing you."

He put it together. "Distant Listener? What are you talking through, a garbage disposal?"

"I can't let them do this to me. Tell them for me, please. The Dawn Patrol must continue." In the background, not far from the caller's telephone, a baby cried. It was a pathetic sound.

"Sorry, D.L. It's a closed book. We finish the end of August. Clement Foy has spoken."

"Tell Mr. Foy to change his mind."

"He won't." Suddenly the idea of sending this loony to plague the program director seemed sweet. "Why not tell him yourself? You can get him here in the daytime."

"I may do that."

When Scott Culligan arrived at six o'clock, Casey Broad was full of beans. "Guess what I've done to old Foy," the night man said to the morning man. He went on to describe the phone call and his advice to the caller.

Culligan looked thoughtful. "You think this nut will take action?"

"He sounded desperate. The Dawn Patrol saves his life."

"Foy needs somebody to work him over. This little station could be an okay place," the Torontonian said patronizingly, "if we had better leadership."

This morning, Broad couldn't wait to speak to Leonora. He met Pat Herbert in the upstairs corridor and thrust his stack of records

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the surprised former librarian who had just come in from the street. "I can't chat now, Pat. Gotta run."

"You sound happy," Herbert complained, "for a man who's losing the best program we've ever had."

Arriving at the apartment with Leonora still asleep, Broad moved about stealthily, preparing breakfast. She woke up to the smell of bacon, toast, and coffee. "What impeccable timing," she said, shuffling into the sunlit kitchen wearing what Broad saw as her adorably tattered blue-flannel dressing gown. They exchanged a musty kiss, then sat down to eat.

"The big news is, I've turned a maniac loose on Clement Foy." Broad told the story of Distant Listener and his rage to keep the Dawn Patrol on the air.

"Storm in a teacup. You'll never hear another word about it."

"He sounded serious."

"Anyway, it won't matter to me. Miss McAvoy says if I keep on moonlighting for CBAY, I can forget about my job at the library. She says lack of sleep is making me slipshod. She found Evelyn Waugh in the same slot with Truman Capote the other day."

"I expect they both enjoyed it."

"How many interesting jobs for a girl are there in Baytown? I have two of them and I want to keep them both."

Nobody realized it was a kidnaping until the telephone call was received by Casey Broad shortly after midnight the following day. Clement Foy hadn't been seen since lunchtime but it was not unusual. Sometimes he vanished to rehearse with his orchestra. He had also been known to consume gallons of draft beer at the Coronet and then fall into somebody's bed on the south side of town. So the staff put phone messages and notes on his desk and breathed more easily than usual because of his absence.

Then Broad took the early-morning call and heard once again the disguised voice of Distant Listener. "This is it, Casey. I have Foy but I won't harm him if you announce the Dawn Patrol stays on."

In the background, Broad could hear the distinctive sound of boxcars being shunted on railway tracks. "It isn't up to me."

"Then speak to management. Tell them I'm not joking. I want a public guarantee your show continues—otherwise nobody will see Foy alive."

Broad did the right thing. He telephoned the police first and then he called the station owner. Chief Greb showed up within the hour,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard the story three times, then asked when the announcement would be made.

"What announcement?"

"About keeping Dawn Patrol on the air."

"Management says no announcement. The show is due to come off for sound business reasons. They can't and won't allow irrational men to dictate company policy."

The police chief rasped a calloused hand across a whiskery chin. "Sounds as if one is doing it now."

Greb went away, leaving Broad with instructions to tape-record all further telephone calls. The phone did not ring any more that night.

But at half past one on the following night, the echoing voice of Distant Listener came through again. "What am I supposed to do with your program director?"

"How is he, D.L.?"

"He's alive."

Watching the recording tape moving slowly from reel to reel, Broad said, "I understand your feelings. I face the long dark hours, too."

"Not like I do. You're doing a job. I'm trying to get used to being alone. I try to sleep and I wake up—and all I have is my thoughts. Nobody here to take me out of myself. So I switch on CBAY and you talk to me, Casey. You play the music I like. You're here in the room with me—it's dark except for the light on the dial and you say some of the same things every night, like family, so predictable, so reassuring. Don't leave me."

"It isn't up to me." Broad repeated.

"If you go, that's the end of Clement Foy." There was a pause. Then the metallic voice rattled sadly. "I've got nothing to lose."

"Can I speak to Clem?"

"He's gagged. But you can play him a record."

"What record?"

"He's a clarinetist. Anything by Benny Goodman."

Broad hurried down the corridor to the library and rummaged through the jazz discs. He wished he had old Pat Herbert there to explain his system. Finally, he turned up the Goodman Sextet rendition of "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise." He took it back to the control room and played it without comment.

He was allowed little sleep the next day. He was wanted at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

station, where Chief Greb and a team of investigators were drinking coffee and listening to last night's taped telephone call. "Anything else you can tell us about this fan of yours?" Greb said.

"I've had several letters over the past two years. I never kept them. They were typed on plain paper, not signed. And there were a couple of telephone calls before this one." Broad glanced at Scott Culligan, then at Leonora. All the staff who could make it had assembled in the big studio.

"There was something," he recalled. "When I was speaking to him the first time, I heard a baby cry."

"A baby?"

"The second call, I heard a freight train. Railway yards."

Greb looked impressed. "A man who has recently lost somebody close—wife or mother. There's a baby in the house and the house is near freight yards. And since he listens to CBAY, it must be within a radius of twenty-five miles. And he calls himself Distant, so we start searching on the outer perimeter."

"One thing," Broad suggested. "The voice is so disguised, it could be a woman. In which case, she lost her husband and is left with the baby."

"But what do you feel in your gut?" Greb said. "A kidnaping? A jazz fan? Does that sound like a man or a woman?"

"A man," Broad conceded.

Leonora Lacey made her comment to herself but the whole room heard it. "And *that's* how much they know about women."

The police search was carried out without success. Baytown concentrated on little else during that week in mid-August. The local paper, *The Banner,* ran front-page stories with photographs of policemen entering isolated residences with railway rolling stock in the background. CBAY news broadcasts began and ended with the latest on the Foy kidnaping. Fastball teams representing the Paragon Cafe and Ace Tire Sales played each other in the Bay League semifinals before a crowd of two hundred when there should have been three times that many in the stands. Casey Broad himself, with listenership at an all-time high, told his audience he believed he knew his man too well to believe he would do anything to harm his captive.

This comment provoked another telephone call from the kidnaper, the first in three days. "Time is running out," the disguised voice

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said. "I can only hold the man for so long. If your management won't act, I'll have to."

Listening closely to the background as well as the voice, Broad heard distinctly the mournful sound of a ship's horn. Could the caller live on the Lake Ontario side of the county? Was it a lakeboat he had heard, passing in the night with some cargo bound for the St. Lawrence Seaway?

"Please don't do anything," the disc jockey said.

"What have I got to lose?"

"The situation isn't so bad. You're holding Foy, but if you set him loose CBAY management will go to bat for you. My guess is you'll get off with a suspended sentence."

The voice sighed. "You're talking about legal processes. The least of my problems. What about my guilty conscience?"

"Have you committed some other crime?"

"What about the night?"

Chief Greb had asked to be informed of developments, so Broad telephoned him as soon as Distant Listener left the line. He played the taped call for him and they discussed it.

"I don't like it," Greb said. "He sounds desperate. I don't normally go along with terrorists but I'm going to ask your boss to extend the Dawn Patrol indefinitely."

Broad was certain Greb's career had never brought him within a country mile of a terrorist. He was equally sure he didn't want his night-shift sentence extended by so much as a week. "Don't be hasty, chief," he said. "We have a new clue. Did you hear the boat horn on this call? You should be looking on the Lake Ontario side."

"For a house with a railway siding," the policeman said wearily, "and a widower changing a baby's diapers."

"Don't be discouraged," Broad said. "Something may break at any time."

The break occurred unexpectedly. Casey had gone home that morning, slept for a few hours, climbed out of bed into a hot, late afternoon, showered, shaved, dressed in cool, smart clothing, and swaggered casually down the hill to the library to collect Leonora after work. He found her at one end of the desk, Miss McAvoy at the other. Their faces were set in such a way as to indicate the two of them might have been on separate continents.

"You see what you've done?" the elderly librarian demanded as she glared at Broad with her fine green eyes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He looked around the room, which seemed to be deserted. "I don't see anything."

"Or anybody. Time was when people came in here and borrowed books. Now they sit up all night listening to your vacant babble. Reading has become too much work—they'd rather be nattered at." Miss McAvoy's head inclined toward her young assistant. "Or hear scraps of poems torn out of context and read to mawkish music."

"Ready when you are," was all Broad could say to Leonora.

When they were outside and walking along Pinnacle Street, she took a deep breath and let it go. "I love working there, but she's really onto me about that program. We had a ten-minute head-to-head before you came in. Because I read 'The Ancient Mariner' last night. She thought I was making fun of it."

"She seems to listen regularly."

"Only to criticize."

"She's jealous." Broad noticed activity on the street ahead—a police van with uniformed officers moving about in the road. "She never thought of doing a poetry program on the air. You did and the old girl can't live with it."

"What's happening?" Leonora said, frowning at the distant scene and quickening her pace.

They found Chief Greb in charge. A crew of municipal workers in overalls were gathered by their mechanical digger, solemn as a funeral congregation. Raw earth was piled on the asphalt beside a length of newly excavated trench. A tarpaulin had been spread at the bottom of it. "What gives?" Broad asked.

"Better not look in there," Greb advised. "They were digging to locate a gas leak in the new pipe laid six months ago. Happens all the time. But they found something. A woman's body wrapped in a rug."

"Whose?"

"The body is decomposed but there's a ceramic brooch with the name Peggy."

"Peg Herbert," Leonora said, and they all turned and stared across the lawn, past shrubs and flowers, to the big old house where the record librarian lived.

"She was cruel to my siamese cat," Pat Herbert confessed. He was behaving in a hospitable manner to Chief Greb and Casey and Leonora. He seemed relieved to be able to talk about his crime. They were gathered around a table in the high-ceilinged kitchen drinking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lemonade and eating ginger snaps from a freshly opened package. Clement Foy, unharmed but in need of rest and intravenous feeding, had been taken away in an ambulance.

"It was an instinctive reaction," Herbert went on. "Peg's foot went out, the cat screamed, and I swung the half gallon bottle of gin I was pouring from and hit her on the side of the head."

"Was she killed instantly?" Greb asked.

"No, she was breathing. But I know Peggy—if she had come to and realized I struck her, you can't imagine the terrible things she'd have said to me." Herbert's confident stare confirmed his madness. "So I had to kill her. I had no choice. Then I told everybody she'd gone to work in Toronto."

"How did you kill her?"

"A pillow over her face. I made very sure. My hands went pins and needles. While that was happening, I thought of burying her in the excavation outside where the men were putting in the new gas pipe late that night, when there was no traffic. Next day they finished the job and paved it over."

Greb drank his lemonade with satisfaction. There was no animosity in his attitude toward the murderer. "What about the sounds we heard on the telephone—the trains, the boat horn?"

"I borrowed sound-effects records from CBAY library," Herbert said. "To mislead you." He smiled apologetically. "I only wanted to make them change their minds about the Dawn Patrol."

"Why Distant Listener?" Broad inquired. "You live around the corner."

The librarian shrugged. "You and I were never close."

As they were leaving the house, Pat Herbert being taken peacefully into custody, he said, "Somebody must take care of kitty."

"No problem," Greb said. "We'll look after the animal."

The siamese cat moved sinuously around her master's legs, and as he bent to pick her up she made a sound eerily like the cry of a baby.

From the end of August, as advertised, the Dawn Patrol came off the air. CBAY was dark much earlier after that because the contract for Leonora's poetry program was terminated as well. Casey joined the day shift, slept well of nights, and soon established a fair audience for his phone-in show, Broadly Speaking. He was able to improve the quality of Leonora's life, too, by including a books segment twice a week, during which the assistant librarian reviewed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a novel and invited comments from listening readers. The emotional climate at the Baytown Library improved as well after Leonora invited Miss McAvoy onto the show as a guest reviewer.

During the week before Christmas, Casey drove to the maximum-security hospital in Centralia, fifty miles away, to visit Pat Herbert and bring him a gift. The professional opinion was that Herbert would spend the rest of his life inside, for his own safety and that of the population. The librarian had put on weight but he seemed more distant than ever. Broad's attempts at making conversation were not very successful.

"It must be tough for you in here," he concluded.

"The nights are the worst. I knew they would be. No Dawn Patrol to sustain me. Not that I could pick it up here even if you were still doing it."

Broad pushed the package across the table. "I thought of a way," he said. "Merry Christmas."

Herbert opened the box and found a portable cassette player and a stack of cassette tapes with dates marked on the labels.

"I went to the archives," Broad explained. "I dubbed all my old programs onto these cassettes. These are only some of them. I'll bring more the next time I visit. You'll end up with two years' worth of Dawn Patrol. By the time you've played them all, you can start again at the beginning."

The pills they gave him kept Pat Herbert in a state of twilight sleep. He enjoyed the feeling. On a table beside his bed, one of the cassettes turned in the machine. It was a program from the early days of the Dawn Patrol, when Peg had still been alive. He thought he could remember the night, his sister striding into his room at one o'clock and switching off his radio, treating him like a kid. She came back later, as usual, sat on the bed, put her arms around him, and kissed him. But all of that lovey-dovey brother-and-sister business left him cold.

Now, at last, he was getting his own way. It hadn't been easy. They wanted to take off the Dawn Patrol but here he was, listening to it. Forever. He drew his legs up under the rough sheet and hugged himself. The record ended and Casey Broad came on, talking about nothing in particular. Pat decided he would ask for paper and a pen tomorrow so he could write old Case a letter. It seemed important for him to reassure the disc jockey that he was not alone, that Distant Listener would always be with him, out there in the dark.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

CLARK HOWARD

The manager was a heavyset man who looked as if he had a bad taste in his mouth. "We require first and last months' rent in advance, plus fifty dollars deposit on utilities. An extra hundred deposit if you got kids. You got kids?"

"I don't want an apartment," George told him. "My name is George Wolf. I am the brother of Amalie Wolf. I have come for her belongings."

A moving new story from Clark Howard, whose biggest book yet, Dirt Rich, *has just been published by St. Martin's . . .*

SCALPLOCK

by CLARK HOWARD

Rita saw the young man as he came out of the Las Vegas bus depot and stood at the curb looking at the brilliant lights of the Union Plaza Hotel and Casino. She was working across the street because the Union Plaza security guards did not permit street girls near the hotel. Normally Rita would have ignored the young man; he looked too country to risk crossing the street for: old faded Levis, worn Western boots, a khaki shirt like gas-station attendants wore. He appeared to be deeply tanned under a straw Western hat, so she figured he was a cowboy or construction worker. Probably didn't have two twenties to fold together. Still, you never knew. Business had been such a bitch all night long. Plus which she was on her own now, had been for a week, since Greg, her boyfriend, had taken off for San Francisco. She decided to take a chance and cross the street.

Keeping a wary eye out for Union Plaza security, Rita sauntered across Main toward the depot. She had lost some weight the past

© 1986 by Clark Howard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

few weeks—the heat of August in the desert, she guessed. Her miniskirt did not fit as snugly as she would have liked. For that same reason, she now had to open an additional button on her blouse to show any cleavage at all. Still, she knew she looked better than most girls on the street. Her main problem was making sure her true age didn't show—she had to appear at least eighteen or it spooked customers.

"Hi, there," she said, stopping next to the young man at the curb.

"Hello," he replied, with only a glance. Rita saw now that he wasn't suntanned at all; his skin was naturally clay-colored, and his hair under the straw hat, his eyebrows, even his eyeballs, were black and shiny. Maybe he's Mexican, she thought.

"Waiting for somebody?" she asked.

He glanced at her again. "No."

"Looking for a cab? A bus maybe?"

"No."

Rita nodded resignedly. "Okay. You're going to stand here all night, right?"

He fished a slip of paper out of his shirt pocket. "Do you know where this is at?"

Rita looked at the paper. On it was written the address of some cheap apartments on West Sahara Boulevard. "Sure, I know where it's at." Thinking quickly, she said, "Listen, if you're not in any big hurry to get there, I have an apartment a couple of blocks from here. Maybe you and I could—"

"I would like to go to this place as soon as I can," he said, taking back the slip of paper. "Will you tell me how to get there?"

Wonderful, Rita thought. She had taken a chance of being shagged by Union Plaza security to play Travelers Aid. "Okay," she said, a little exasperated. "Go down to the corner there and take a bus that has 'Las Vegas Strip' on the front—"

"Tell me how to walk there, please," he interrupted.

"*Walk* there? In this heat? This is the *desert*. It's six or seven miles."

"I will walk. Tell me, please."

Rita shrugged and gave him directions. Main to Wyoming and Highland to Sahara, then turn right and look for the number.

"Wyoming?" he said, looking surprised. "There is a street here named Wyoming? Is there one named Montana?"

"Not that I know of."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh." He seemed disappointed. "Thank you for your help," he said and started to walk away.

"Listen," Rita said quickly, "you could leave your suitcase here. I mean, it *is* a long walk. You could leave your suitcase in a locker in the bus depot."

He paused and turned back, frowning. "A locker?"

"Yeah, sure. Come on, I'll show you."

She led him into the brightly lighted waiting room and over to a bank of coin-operated baggage lockers. "You'll need two quarters." He picked two quarters out of some change from his pocket and Rita showed him where to deposit them. She held the locker door open while he put his bag inside and locked it for him. "You can leave it there twenty-four hours, then you have to put two more quarters in. And don't lose this key or they'll make you fill out all kinds of papers to get your suitcase back. I have to go now. It was nice meeting you."

She went into the ladies room and held the door open a crack to watch him. For a moment he studied the key she had given him, then buttoned it securely in his shirt pocket and left the depot. Rita followed him outside, waited until he was well down the block, then went back inside to get his suitcase. Every evening she invested fifty cents in a locker just to get a key she could switch with a likely victim if one should come along. Tonight she figured she had blown the fifty cents again. But you never knew. This guy had acted awfully funny. Maybe he was on something; there might be drugs in the suitcase she could sell. Or use. She could stand a little speed; lately she had been dragging. She was sure she was anemic. Tomorrow she had a doctor's appointment for a checkup.

As casually as if it were hers, Rita got the suitcase out of the locker and started home with it.

The young man with the key in his shirt pocket was not bothered by the temperature as he walked. Las Vegas was high desert, the heat was very dry, and he was accustomed to both higher humidity and longer walks. The distance to the address on West Sahara Boulevard was only half as far as the girl at the bus depot had said it was and the young man was there in less than an hour. It was a large, tacky apartment complex with uncut grass and tight little patios crowded with bicycles, portable barbecues, and forgotten toys. A variety of noises came through walls too thin for privacy. The manager, who occupied a corner apartment, was a heavyset man

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who looked as if he had a bad taste in his mouth. Before the young man even spoke he said, "We require first and last months' rent in advance, plus fifty dollars deposit on utilities. An extra hundred deposit if you got kids. You got kids?"

"I don't want an apartment," the young man told him. "My name is George Wolf. I am the brother of Amalie Wolf. I have come for her belongings."

"Oh." The manager's eyes flicked over George's frame, assessing. "There's a week's rent owed. Eight days, actually."

George Wolf nodded. "I will pay. How much?"

The manager picked up a pocket calculator from his desk and pressed a few keys. "Make it seventy dollars. I won't charge you for utilities."

George paid him and the manager took a cardboard box from a closet and handed it to him. Suddenly the manager seemed uncomfortable. "That's all there was left. The guy she was living with took most of the big stuff: the TV and stereo and stuff."

George didn't open the box. He wanted desperately to see the things his sister had left behind, to touch something that she had touched, but he would not do it in front of a stranger, particularly a white stranger. "Where did he go, the man my sister lived with?" he asked quietly.

The manager shrugged. "If I was to tell you and you done some harm to him, why, I could get in trouble."

"Is there a reason for me to do harm to the man?" George asked. His eyes never left the manager's face and he did not blink once.

"Depends on how you look at it," the manager said, a little nervously. "Your sister died of a drug overdose. The cops didn't hold the guy she was living with, so it stands to reason they don't blame him for it. But the way the cops think and the way her own brother thinks, there could be a lot of difference. Especially since—" He shrugged again, letting his words trail off.

"Especially since I am an Indian, is that what you mean?"

"I didn't say nothing like that."

George smiled a slight, cold smile. "I may not be white, but I know some of the white man's ways." He put several bills in front of the manager. "Give me the name and address of the man my sister lived with. I will tell no one I found out from you. That is my promise."

The manager pushed a scratchpad and ballpoint at him, and told him what to write down. "It's about a mile from here, straight down Sahara. But you won't find him at home now. He works nights as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a stick man at a craps table. He probably won't be home until morning."

"I will wait," George said.

His words expressed no emotion at all. The manager was afraid of him nevertheless and was relieved when he left.

Rita was back on the street when George returned to the bus depot. She had put his suitcase in another locker and had the new key in her purse. The suitcase, which she had carefully searched in her apartment, had contained nothing of value: a few changes of clothes, a magazine-sized leather pouch—empty, with some kind of Indian-looking markings on it—a long strip of rawhide or something similar, and a return bus ticket to Lame Deer, Montana. No money, no drugs, not even any jewelry she could hock.

When she saw George walking back into the bus depot, she hurried across the street to intercept him. Her intent was to tell him that she had given him the wrong locker key by mistake, the key he had was to a locker she was using, and she would trade keys with him. That way, he had no beef against her—his suitcase, with all its contents, was intact. But as she trotted into the depot, she saw that George wasn't headed toward the coin lockers at all; he had gone to a nearby bench in the waiting room and sat down. He had a cardboard box on his knees and was going through its contents. From where she stood, Rita could see that the young man's stolid, dark face had turned soft with sadness.

Edging around the side of the waiting room, Rita worked her way behind him and unobtrusively moved to where she could look over his right shoulder. Watching, she saw him take one article at a time out of the cardboard box and examine it thoughtfully, almost lovingly. There was an obviously cheap gold-colored bracelet that he turned over and over in his hands; a hairbrush from which he drew a long black hair that he caressed gently and then put back; a polyester scarf that he held briefly to his nose; a makeup compact with a little mirror that he opened and stared at for a long time. It was while he was staring at the mirror that Rita moved around the bench and sat down next to him.

"Hi again," she said.

George looked at her and then back at the mirror. "I heard a story when I was a boy that if you stare at a mirror long enough, you can see the last image that the mirror saw." The sorrow in his face took on a melancholy smile. "It is not true."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Whose image are you looking for?"

"My sister's. She is dead. I had not seen her in a long time." He put the compact back and closed the box. "It doesn't seem right that a piece of glass saw my sister before she died and I did not."

"Life's not always right," Rita said knowingly. She had the other locker key in her closed hand—her palm was becoming moist around it. "Are you going to take a bus back where you came from now?"

George shook his head, his eyes narrowing á fraction. "No. There is something I must do first. In the morning."

"Well," she said, seizing the opportunity, "you'll want your suitcase so you can find a place to stay." Before he could protest, Rita had unbuttoned the flap of his shirt pocket and fished out the locker key she had seen him put there. "You wait here with your sister's things and I'll get it for you."

She clicked across the waiting-room floor in her spike heels, switching the keys as she went, found the right locker, and removed his bag.

"Here you go," she said when she got back to the bench with it.

"You have been very kind to help me," George said. "You are a good person."

"Yeah, well," Rita said, feeling herself blush. She forced an embarrassed smile. "Listen, I've got to run. You take care, hear?"

"Before you go, can you tell me which way it is to the nearest woods?"

"The nearest what?"

"Woods. Forest. I will sleep among the trees tonight."

"I already told you once, this is the *desert,*" Rita replied. "There aren't no woods." She sighed dramatically. "There's a cheap hotel across the street, the Sal Sagev—that's Las Vegas spelled backwards. You better get a room there."

"I have no money for a room," George said. "I had to pay rent that my sister owed. And I had to give a man money to tell me where someone was."

"Who?"

"Someone I must see tomorrow."

"Well, lookit," Rita said, "there just aren't no woods and you can't sleep in the desert, it's full of scorpions." She began tapping one foot like an impatient mother. "If you try to sleep here in the bus depot, the cops'll bust you for vag."

"What's that?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Being broke. Don't you know it's a crime not having no money? Where do you come from anyway?"

George shrugged. "From a place where it's not a crime to have no money."

"Well, you'd better go back there as soon as you can," Rita advised cynically.

"I will. Tomorrow."

Rita tilted her head, studying him. "You have to stay until tomorrow?"

"Yes."

Looking up at the big waiting-room clock, Rita thought, what the hell, the night was shot anyway. She was too bushed to even think about another trick. Tomorrow, she was sure, she was going to find out she was anemic.

"Come on," she said, smoothing her skirt over her thin hips, "you can crash on my couch for the night. But you'll have to split early—I *have a doctor's appointment at nine.*"

Chump, she thought as she led him out to the street. Getting soft in your old age. By the time you're seventeen, you'll be a real patsy.

Later that evening, Rita came into her postage-stamp living room wearing a ratty terrycloth robe and trying to comb wet tangles out of her hair. "You can use the shower now if you want," she told George, who was sitting on her tired velour sofa, once again going through the box of his dead sister's belongings.

"Thank you," he said. "I was hoping to find something of my sister's that I could give you for being so kind to me. But I am afraid there is nothing of value."

Peering into the box, Rita said, "That little bracelet looks like it might be worth something."

George shook his head. "If it was worth anything," he said darkly, "the man she lived with would have taken it." Then he added, "But if you would like it—"

"No, you better keep it, being your sister's and all," Rita said. Taking something that a dead person had worn gave her the creeps anyway.

She sat on the arm of the sofa, tugging at her hair with a large comb. "How'd your sister end up in Vegas?" she asked curiously.

"Because of something that happened more than a hundred years ago," George said. "Do you know the story of General Custer and the Little Bighorn?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Custer massacre? When I was a little girl back in Milwaukee, my stepfather used to take me with him to this neighborhood tavern where they had a big picture of it behind the bar. What's that got to do with your sister?"

"There were many tribes which fought Custer at the Little Bighorn, and when it was over those tribes had to run away because the Army sent thousands of soldiers to hunt them down and kill them. Sitting Bull, the great Sioux medicine man, took his people north into Canada where the white soldiers couldn't follow. Some of the Shahiyena tribe, which the whites called the Cheyenne, went with the Sioux. Crazy Dog took a band to Canada—so did Rock Forehead, Little Robe, Wolf Tooth, and others. Wolf Tooth was my great-grandfather. My full name is George Wolf Tooth."

Hell, Rita thought, he's not even a Mexican, he's an *Indian*. And I brought him home for the night. Your porch light's getting dim, kid.

"Many Shahiyena were not able to escape to Canada, to the north, and had to flee south," George continued. "They went down into what is now Wyoming and Colorado but were not part of the United States at the time. Some went over into Nebraska, which *was* a state. Because the Shahiyena spread out in so many directions, the tribe never got back together again as one people. Even today we are known by the part of the country in which we live. I am a Northern Cheyenne—we live mostly in Montana. But those of us who live in the North have uncles and cousins who are Southern Cheyennes or Western Cheyennes."

He gazed off at nothing for a long moment, his clean features dissolving into despair. He was really kind of nice-looking, Rita thought. Not a hunk like Greg had been, but still not bad.

"My sister grew weary of our life in the North," George said at last. "It is a very simple life and often young people my own age find it dull and tiresome, so they go away. Amalie went to live with our cousins in Ogallala, Nebraska. She got a job as a waitress in a cafe on the big Interstate highway that comes out here to Las Vegas and goes on to California. One day a man came through driving a big shiny car—"

"You don't have to say another word," Rita interrupted, "I *been* there. I can even describe the guy for you. Nice tan, sunglasses, gold chain around his neck, shirt unbuttoned halfway down. And he prob'ly told her he had 'connections' in Las Vegas."

George shrugged. "I don't know what he told her. I only know that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she went with him. And now she is dead from using drugs." He lowered his head. "We didn't even find out about her until after the time had passed for claiming her body. She had already been cremated. They didn't even keep the ashes for her people."

Rita had stopped combing her hair.

"Our way of burial would have been different," George said. "First she would have been wrapped in a cloak of white rabbit fur and placed on a raised travois on the bank of the Rosebud River. The travois would have been made of cedar and ash and pine, all freshly cut so that their fragrances would surround her. We would have prayed around the travois for a day and a night. Then she would have been put on a bed of wildflowers—yellow primroses, white wild lilies, red coralroot, and blue lobelias—in a canoe made of white birch. Her body would have floated down the Rosebud to our sacred burial ground. There the women would have placed her in the ground and covered her resting place with the flowers from the canoe. When those flowers died, their seeds would have taken root and new blossoms would grow every spring."

Rita was enraptured. "That's beautiful," she said. "I never heard anything so beautiful before. I'm sorry you didn't get here before they cremated her." Then something occurred to her. "This thing you have to do in the morning—you're going to see the guy who brought your sister out here, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Hey," she cautioned, "I hope you're not planning to do anything dumb. I mean, they've got a state prison up in Carson City that's like *ancient*. I know a guy that did time up there. The cells are like *dungeons*, you know what I'm saying? You don't want to end up in a joint like that."

George shook his head. "No."

"Okay. So you're not going to do anything dumb, right?"

He shook his head again. "No, nothing dumb."

"Smartest thing you can do," she lectured, "is forget that guy and get on a bus out of here in the morning. This town is a scab, believe me, and it never heals." She bobbed her chin toward the tiny bedroom and bath. "Go on now and take your shower like a good kid."

Listen to me, will you, she thought as George left the room. The guy's at least four or five years older than me and I'm playing mommy to him. I ought to be seeing a shrink tomorrow instead of an M.D.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

While George was in the shower, Rita went to her stash and got a couple of joints to smoke after she had closed her bedroom door.

Closed it and *locked* it.

Just in case.

When Rita dragged out of the bedroom the next morning, feeling as if she had not rested at all, George was at the sink in the tiny kitchenette, slowly gliding the blade of a bone-handled pocketknife across the smooth surface of a four-inch-square whetstone. Every few strokes he would hold the blade under the faucet, which was running a thin stream of water. Rita mustered enough energy to become angry.

"Wonderful," she snapped. "You promised last night you weren't going to do anything dumb."

George looked at her, frowning. "I promised nothing."

"You're going over there to murder that man, aren't you?"

"No, I am not." George rinsed the blade, dried it on his shirttail, and closed the knife. "I am only going to take his scalplock."

Rita winced. "His what?"

"Scalplock." Turning off the faucet, George wrapped the whetstone in a square of soft leather and put it in his pocket. "It is a piece of his scalp. Four inches wide, from the top of his forehead in front to the top of his neck in back. That is all."

"That's *all?* You don't call that murder?" she asked incredulously.

"No. He will not die. It will be no worse than if he suffered a bad burn."

Rita grimaced, confused. "I thought when people got scalped it killed them."

The young Indian smiled tolerantly. "Only in the white man's movies. Usually a soldier, or a warrior—the white man scalped, too—was dead before his hair was taken, killed by a bullet or a saber, an arrow or a warclub. Scalps were taken when the fighting was over. There have been many instances when a man was thought to be dead and his scalp was taken—his whole scalp, not just the scalplock—and even after he was fully scalped he recovered to tell about it. My own great-grandmother, Wolf Tooth's middle wife, Fox Eye, was scalped by a soldier and survived. It is told that her hair grew back more beautiful than ever."

"I don't believe this conversation." Rita walked wearily into the living room and sat down. George, seeing he had upset her, followed and knelt on the floor in front of her.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Let me try to explain something to you. In our tribe, we have an elder, a very old man, who is called the Keeper of the Sacred Arrows. In his home he has a section of buffalo hide which contains six arrows that have been used in battle against the Shahiyena's six traditional enemies: the Crow, the Ute, the Shoshone, the Pawnee, the Blackfeet, and the white man. These arrows remain sacred, and our people maintain their tribal honor only as long as none of our traditional enemies commits an offense against us. If one of them does commit an offense, if one of them steals from us, cheats us, lures away one of our women—"

"Wait," Rita interrupted. "That's why you're going to cut off this man's hair? Because he lured your sister to Las Vegas? Don't you think *she* was partly to blame? I mean, she could've said no."

"Yes, the council of elders took that into consideration. Amalie went with the white man of her own free will. That is why I've been sent for his scalplock instead of his life. It was felt that this man took advantage of my sister's free will. He was much wiser and more worldly than she and influenced her beyond a point which was acceptable. Had it not been for him, she wouldn't have become involved with the drugs that killed her." George studied Rita closely for a moment. "Do you understand?"

"No, I don't. But what difference does it make?"

"It makes a lot of difference." He took her hands in his. "You have been kind to me; it's important to me that you do not feel that I have lied to you or broken a promise. You are my friend—I want you to understand."

"The only thing I understand is that you're about to get yourself into something very heavy." She sniffed as if trying to hold back tears. "I just hate to see you do it, that's all."

George squeezed her hands. "There will be no trouble," he assured her. "It will be over very quickly and I will be gone like the morning mist when the sun rises. You are good to worry about me." Suddenly he frowned. "Rita, why are you all alone? You are so young to be alone."

She shrugged and sniffed again. "I had a boyfriend until last week. He took off."

"Where are your people?"

"Milwaukee. That's in Wisconsin." She became embarrassed. "I don't keep in touch no more. The stepfather I told you used to take me to the neighborhood tavern with him? Well, he used to take me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other places, too. Like into the bedroom when my old lady was at work. I didn't know how to tell her. So I just left."

"Will your boyfriend come back?" George asked with obvious concern.

Rita forced herself to brighten up. "Oh, sure, he'll be back any day now. Probably bring me a nice present." What the hell, she thought, why let the guy worry about her when he had problems of his own. As for Greg, he was gone for good. Guys like Greg never came back. They just drained all a person had, then went on to the next one.

"I am happy you will not be alone for long." George stood up. "I must go now."

She managed a smile. "Yeah—me, too. I can't be late for the doctor. Listen, you take care."

"I will. You, too." At the door, with his suitcase and the cardboard box, George paused. "Thank you for everything," he said.

He went to the bus station and put the suitcase and box in a locker, then he walked back through the increasing morning heat to Sahara Boulevard and started following the numbers on the apartment buildings, carrying in one hand the slip of paper on which he'd written the name—Nick Gordon—and address of the man his sister had been living with. From time to time, waiting to cross a street, George would look at the name, wondering what Nick Gordon would be like. How big would he be, how strong? Would he fight hard or give up easily? In the pocket with his knife, George carried a slip-tie of the kind used to capture wild ponies. The previous night, while Rita slept, he had fashioned it out of the length of rawhide from his suitcase. It resembled a lariat made of leather. With a quick jerk, the intricate slipknot could hold a man's wrist or foot as tautly as a steel chain. George had been using slip-ties since he was eight—he was very good with them.

When he found the right address, he looked on a bank of mailboxes and located Nick Gordon's apartment number: 308. All apartment doors were outside, on walkways that ringed the building on each floor. It was a large building and George saw a few people coming and going, but no one paid any attention to him. Unobtrusively, he made his way up two flights of cement steps and along the walkway to 308. At the door, he took the slip-tie from his pocket and enlarged the restraining loop to about twice fist-size. Holding it at his side, he knocked.

The door was opened by a man about thirty-five who had a nice

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

suntan and thick black hair with long sideburns. Except for his eyes, he was handsome. His eyes were somehow offensive—they flicked over George, top to bottom.

"Mr. Nick Gordon?" George asked.

"Yeah, what do you want?"

"I was told to give you this." George held out the rawhide slip-tie.

Nick Gordon instinctively reached for it, and when his right hand was at the proper angle George expertly flipped the loop around his wrist and jerked it tight. "Hey, what the hell?"

That was all the protest Gordon could voice before George spun him around, twisting his arm behind him, and pushed him back inside the apartment. Elbowing the door shut after them, he put a foot in front of Gordon and tripped him to the floor. Grabbing the other man's left foot, he bent it up behind him and looped the thong once around the ankle. Drawing it tight, he had him face down with his right hand held to his left foot.

"What the hell are you doing, man!" Gordon said, half in anger, half in fear. "You want my money, it's on the dresser!"

"I'm not a thief," George said with quiet indignation. Drawing the thong upward, he threw a loop around Gordon's neck, and with one knee in the middle of the helpless man's back he held it firmly in place across his throat, cutting off his voice. The next instant, he had his pocketknife out and with his teeth opened its honed blade. Closing his eyes, he silently intoned the Shahiyena scalping prayer. When his lips stopped moving, he held the blade at the top of Nick Gordon's head, entwined the fingers holding the thong in Gordon's thick black hair, and pulled it to tauten the scalp for slicing.

But it did not tauten. The hair, all of it, came off in George's hand—a great round mass of it—leaving the top of the man's head bald and shiny.

George got to his feet, staring at the thing in his hand. On the floor, the loop slipped from around Gordon's neck and he twisted and struggled until his foot was loose. "You crazy son of a bitch!" he said.

George looked at him, then back at the bowl of hair in his hand. He didn't understand. This man was wearing a scalp!

"Try to choke me, will you?" Gordon sputtered. "I'll kill you!" Jerking open an end-table drawer, he snatched out a small revolver and pushed the cylinder free. From a box of cartridges, he fumbled to load it. At the sight of the gun, George's eyes widened in fear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still holding the patch of hair, he wrenched open the apartment door and fled.

In his examining room, the doctor, whose name was Franken, asked, "How old are you really, Rita?"

"Twenty-one—like the form says," Rita replied with practiced annoyance. She chastised herself for not wearing more makeup. She had tried to dress like some of the young women she saw pushing shopping carts with toddlers in the child seat in the supermarket. They always seemed to be wearing slacks, blouses, sandals, and shoulder-strap bags. They were all scrubbed-looking—the effect Rita had wanted today—but apparently she had not achieved it.

"Do you have any identification that proves your age?" the doctor wanted to know.

"You sound like a bartender," Rita grumbled.

The doctor, a short man with a beard, said, "Rita, we've got a problem, you and I. If you're under eighteen, and I suspect you are, I'd like to get in touch with your parents."

"Forget it," she told him firmly. She studied the look of concern on the doctor's face. "Is there something wrong with me?"

"You have gonorrhea, Rita."

She looked relieved. "Is *that* all? Oh, look, I've had it twice before. It's no big deal. Just start me on penicillin shots."

"I'm afraid it *is* a big deal this time, Rita," he said gravely. "Do you know what AIDS is?"

The color drained from her face. "Oh, no."

"You can understand why it's imperative that your family be notified," Dr. Franken said. "We also have to contact your school so that any boys you've been intimate with can be referred to their own doctors."

"I don't go to—school," Rita said, her mouth suddenly dry. Her confidence was gone now, her eyes wide with fright. "I'm a hooker, see? A runaway and a hooker."

The doctor's expression reflected a fleeting moment of incredulity, but he quickly composed himself. "I see. Well, it's important that we contact as many of your clients as possible, Rita."

She shook her head. "I work the street, Doc. My tricks don't leave calling cards. But I can tell you where I probably got the AIDS." She gave the doctor Greg's full name. "He's bi. We lived together for about six months. He took off for San Francisco last week with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some guy who was down for the weekend." She swallowed tightly and asked, "What's going to happen to me?"

"There's a Public Health Service hospital in Phoenix I could send you to," the doctor said. "It wouldn't cost you anything and they have the personnel and facilities to work up a complete prognosis on your condition."

"AIDS kills people, doesn't it?" she asked bluntly. Tears were trying to escape her eyes but she wouldn't let them.

"AIDS itself doesn't kill people," Dr. Franken explained. "AIDS is a condition known as Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. It's a condition that helps other conditions kill people. The gonorrhea you have that was so simply cured for you twice before, for instance, could develop this time into meningitis that could affect your spinal column and brain, or endocarditis that could affect the membranes of your heart."

"Okay, okay," Rita interrupted. "I don't want to hear no more. How do I get into that hospital you mentioned?"

"I'll telephone and arrange admittance. Do you have bus fare to Phoenix?"

"Sure I do. I'm not a charity case, you know. I got my own checking account."

"Fine," Dr. Franken said. He circled Greg's name on his pad. "The San Francisco health authorities will have to look for your boyfriend."

"*Ex*-boyfriend."

"All right, ex-boyfriend. Now, before you go there's one thing I'd like you to do for me. Let me call the county health department to send a representative over to get you. They'll want to take your photograph and show it around areas where you worked to try and find some of the men you've been with."

Rita shrugged. "Why not? I'm not going to be around no more anyhow."

"Good." Dr. Franken rose. "You wait here in the examining room while I make arrangements."

After he left and Rita was alone in the quiet stillness of the cubicle, she lay back down on the examining table, closed her eyes, and sighed as wearily as if she were a tired old woman. Finally she let the tears come.

It was just after noon when Rita got back to her apartment and found George sitting outside her door. "Oh, no," she said. "Look,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man, I've got a big problem right now, okay?" Seeing the hairy object in his hand, she looked away. "Is that what I think it is?"

"He was wearing a scalp," George told her incredulously. "It came off in my hand."

Rita looked back at it. "That's a *toupee,* you dummy. Oh, I don't need this." She put the key in the lock and opened the door.

"What is a two-pay?" George asked. "Not a scalp?"

"No." Snatching it from him impatiently, she turned it inside-out and showed him the sewn lining. "It's for guys that lose their hair."

"From scalping?"

"No—for guys whose hair falls out!" Thrusting it back at him, she said, "Look, I'm sorry but you gotta go. I'm trying to deal with something really heavy right now."

"I'll go," George said. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you again." From his shirt pocket he took the scrap of paper and looked at the address again. "I must go see this man again."

"What? Are you crazy?" She glared at him. "He's probably got the cops over there waiting for you."

George shook his head. "He's not the kind who calls the police. He has his own gun."

"Wonderful. Look, you've *got* his hair—that's what you came for, isn't it?"

George glanced scornfully at the toupee. "It isn't really his hair. I must take his scalplock—"

"But he doesn't *have* one! Gimme a break here!"

"He has hair in back and on the sides, and in front of his ears," George said stubbornly.

Rita shook her head in amazement. "You're crazy, you know that? Look, read my lips: *You—are—crazy.*"

"I do what is necessary," George informed her. He started to turn away.

"Wait a minute," she said quickly. "Look, it's your business, okay? Who am I to stop you. But I want you to do me a favor first. You owe me a favor, am I right?" He nodded. "Okay. I have to go out of town, see, on personal business. Wait for me to pack and carry my suitcase to the bus depot for me, will you? It's right on your way. I mean, it's so hot out there I don't think I can make it by myself. Will you help me?"

"Of course," said George.

"Super. Go in and sit down while I run get my suitcase from the landlady. I let her borrow it last week to visit her brother in Reno."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

George sat and waited, folding and unfolding the scrap of paper with Nick Gordon's address on it. Rita was gone nearly twenty minutes. When she returned, she had two uniformed policemen with her.

"That's him," she said, pointing at George. "He tried to rape me."

George stood up, bewildered, as the officers swiftly descended on him, one of them pinioning his arms behind him and handcuffing his wrists, the other patting him down in a body search and relieving him of his pocketknife. George stared at Rita in wide-eyed disbelief, but she refused to look at him. Presently one of the policemen took George down to sit in the caged back seat of the radio car while the other officer remained with Rita to do the paperwork. It took ten minutes to fill out the arrest form and complaint, both of which Rita signed. The officer, handing her a copy, said, "Be at the address on the form for arraignment court at nine in the morning."

"Right."

She watched out the window as they drove George away. When the car was out of sight, she went to her stash and rolled a joint. Smoking it, she dragged out an old Samsonite overnighter and started packing. It occurred to her that the assortment of things she was carelessly tossing into the bag weren't a whole lot different from the things in the cardboard box that had belonged to George's sister. Too bad we didn't know each other, she thought. Maybe I could have helped her, given her a few tips. As soon as the thought manifested, she grunted softly. Listen to me. The blind leading the blind.

She finished the joint and her packing, and started to leave. On the way out, she noticed a scrap of paper on the floor. It was the address George had had with him. He must have dropped it when the police grabbed him. Rita picked it up and studied it. She pursed her lips and tapped the toe of one sandal. Then she shrugged and thought, Why not? Why the hell not?

Sixty days later, George walked out of the county jail and stood indecisively for a moment on the hot Las Vegas sidewalk. In one hand he had his suitcase, in the other the box containing his sister's belongings. The police, finding the key when George was booked, had gone to the bus depot and opened the locker. Finding nothing incriminating, they had put the suitcase and box in the jail property room to be held for his release. He had been given back the rest of his things, even his pocketknife, which was under the legal blade length. In a shirt pocket, he had his return bus ticket to Lame Deer,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Montana. He no longer had the piece of paper with Nick Gordon's address on it, but that didn't bother him. He was sure he could find the place again.

As he started down the street toward the bus station to check his suitcase and the box in a locker again, he heard a voice behind him call, "Hey, wait a sec!"

Turning, he saw Rita hurrying toward him. His first reaction was anger. Then, as she got closer, a sudden pity came over him. She looked terrible: pale, very thin, her eyes hollow. Nevertheless, when she reached him he said stiffly, "You should not have done what you did. I almost went to prison."

"You didn't either," she retorted. "There was no complaining witness 'cause I didn't show up. I never intended to."

"Well," he said sullenly, "they put me in jail for two months for vagrancy."

"They didn't either. They gave you thirty days for vag. The other thirty you got for trying to make a break from the courtroom. Hot head."

He looked away. "You shouldn't have done it anyhow," he muttered.

"Come on—" she pulled on his arm "—let's get out of the sun."

They walked to the bus depot, got two glasses of iced tea in the self-service coffee shop, and sat at a tiny table.

"Guess where I've been," she said. George shrugged. "In the hospital," she told him. "Down in Phoenix, Arizona. I've been part of some experiments. Very important *medical* experiments. —I've got Kaposi's sarcoma," she added almost aloofly.

"What's that?"

"Well, let's just say it's not the twenty-four-hour flu. It's here to stay." She found it too embarrassing to describe the ugly purple lesions growing on the surface of her thighs, stomach, and lower back. "Anyway," she went on excitedly, "I was the very first one picked to test a new drug called Ribavirin, which was previously used only on some kind of fever down in Africa. It didn't work, but it was kind of an honor to be picked first."

George nodded gravely. "It is always an honor to be picked first for something important."

She bit her lower lip. "You're probably wondering why I'm here, right?"

George shook his head. "You're still my friend. I know why you did what you did. But it does not change what *I* must do."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But it does," Rita told him anxiously. "That's what I ran away from the hospital for and came here to tell you. That guy Nick Gordon is down there in the same hospital I was in, only he's over in the men's building. He checked in about five weeks ago. He's almost dead. Seems he had sex with someone who had the same thing I've got."

She remembered for a fleeting moment how easy it had been. He'd opened the door and she had said, "Hi, there. Listen, could I trouble you to use your phone? My girlfriend and I want to rent an apartment here and she was supposed to meet me with the deposit, you know, but she hasn't showed. I want to call and see if she's left yet." She had pulled the top of her blouse out and fanned herself. "It's so hot! I can't wait to get my hands on a nice cold beer." He had invited her in and from there on it had been a piece of cake.

"You say he's dying? How do you know?" George asked suspiciously.

"He was a cocaine user," Rita explained. "Over the years, the lining of his nose weakened from snorting the stuff. After he picked up what I've got, he developed something called *Candida albicans,* which is like a fungus, really gross, that grows in the nose, mouth, and throat. There's no way to stop it. The man is practically *finito.*" She saw mistrust in George's eyes. "Don't you believe me?" she asked indignantly.

"I wonder if you are only trying again to keep me out of trouble."

Rita reached across the table and took his hand. "I'm not," she said, the simple phrase coming out with a quaver. "I'm dying, too," she told him. "I wouldn't lie to you, not now. The man can't speak, can't swallow, can't breathe through his nose or throat. He's got a dozen tubes in him. If you want to, you can go to Phoenix and see for yourself, but he'll probably be dead before you get there. He might be dead already."

George's direct, penetrating black eyes studied her across the table for several long moments, his intense concentration muting for him the sounds of the coffee shop around them. When he finally spoke, he said, "I believe you, Rita."

Relief showed in her hollow eyes, her drawn expression. Sniffing, she took back her hand and dabbed at her eyes with a paper napkin. "Look at me, will you?" she said. "Blubbering like some dumb kid. No shame at all."

"Where will you go now?" George asked. "Back to the hospital?"

"Not on your life," she announced. "Me and that place are quits.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm in my final stage, so they won't use me for no more experiments. All's I'd do is live in a separate ward until—well, you know."

"What will you do?" he asked with concern. "Who will look after you?"

"I can look after myself," she assured him. "I'm not no charity case. I got my own checking account. I'll get a room somewheres. No problem."

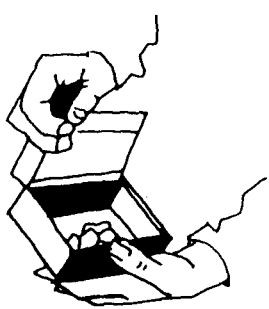
Now it was he who took her hand. "Would you like to come back home with me?"

She had thought to play coy if he asked her, but it was too important. She seized on the offer as if it were salvation. "Could I?" she asked, like a desperate child pleading. "Could I, please?"

"Yes. I will take you. You will be my sister for the time you have left."

"And when it's all over?" she asked. "Will I have the cloak of white rabbit fur and the bed of wildflowers and float down the river in a canoe made of white birch?"

"Yes," he said solemnly, "you will have that." He rose and picked up his suitcase and the box. "Come, sister," he said.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKET

EQ JULY/86

ELLERY QUEEN — published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is $2.95 per word — payable in advance — ($59.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, ME 04609.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMS, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

HARDBACK, paperback mysteries, $3 up. Send stamp. Detective-Mystery Booksearch, P.O. Box 15460, Orlando, FL 32858-5460.

WORLD'S largest mystery specialist. $3 for next 4 catalogues. Aardvarks Book Detectives, P.O. Box 15070, Orlando, FL 32858-5070.

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

SEND 25¢ for Large Listing of Mystery and Detective Books. Canford, Drawer 216E, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

SCREENPLAYS! Learn How to Write like the Pros. Free Catalog! Script Warehouse, 2265 Westwood Blvd. #590I, Los Angeles, CA 90064.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

"HELP FROM GOD" 50 powerful healings! Win higher success! $1. Newlife, Box 684-CJ, Boulder City, Nevada 89005.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

MYSTERIES, THRILLERS. Used hardbacks and paperbacks. Write for free list. Time & Again Books, P.O. Box 13, Bedford, MA 01730.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

$1,000 Weekly Home Business Directory. Free Details. Name and address to: Box 1610-EQ, Darien, Connecticut, 06820-1610.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60559.

250 FOUNDATION—GRANT MONEY SOURCES! No interest! Never repay! Complete Directory, $2.00. Directory DC, 935 Main, Vidor, TX 77662.

$25–$400 Weekly. Remarkable circular mailing opportunity! Free guide from United Mailers Association. Send stamped envelope: Box 191309-CP 25, San Diego, CA 92119.

BE YOUR OWN BOSS! 101 ways to make money with little or no investment using skills you already have. Ideas, explanations, tips, more. $4.00. Davis Enterprises, P.O. Box 7007, Portsmouth, VA 23707. 30 day Guarantee.

TAKE PICTURES for profit. Try our unique methods. Write: Photomoney, 14589H West 32nd, Golden, CO 80401.

"$1,000's WEEKLY!" MAILING LETTERS! FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY! EXCITING FREE DETAIL$! START IMMEDIATELY! WRITE: $UCCESS, #605-DPG, DRESHER, PA 19025.

SECOND INCOME Stuffing Envelopes. Senoff Enterprises, M., 1589 Albion, Rexdale, Ontario M9V 1B6. Enclose a self-addressed envelope.

HUNDREDS WEEKLY Home Mailing Program. Free Details. MMI-U, Box 339, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

DEALERSHIPS available for STEELE GLAZE automotive products and detailing business. No Fees or percentage. For details, write: Richmond Company, 53 Hummingbird Lane, Muscatine, Iowa 52761.

THE ARABS HAVE MILLIONS to Loan, Invest, Purchase! FREE DETAILS! PRS-DC, 935 Main, Vidor, TX 77662.

HOMEWORKERS! EARN 60¢ each envelope you return to us, according to instructions. Write: Distributors, Box 431-DP, Lynbrook, New York 11563.

$10-$360 WEEKLY/Up, Mailing Circulars! No Quotas, Sincerely Interested, Rush stamped envelope: National Mailing, Box 20567-EN6, San Diego, CA 92120.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations...Closeouts...Job Lots...Single Samples. Free Details: Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 730-IO, Holland, MI 49423.

DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

$$$$ #1 Multilevel system, signature and business loans available. No collateral guaranteed! Send Sase and $10.00: Rocket Enterprise, 1903 Sparkman Drive #112, Huntsville, ALA 35816.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES! Economical home study for Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate. Prestigious faculty counsels for independent study and life experience credits. Free information—Richard Crews, M.D. (Harvard), President, Columbia Pacific University, 1415 Third St., Dept. 2M17, San Rafael, CA 94901; Toll Free: 800/227-1617, Ext. 480; California: 800/772-3545, Ext. 480.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION—Cont'd

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, N.C. 28560.

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL. Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D's . . . without attending classes! Inexpensive, fast. Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-EQ-7, Tustin, California 92680.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

HOW TO GET A JOB IN THE POST OFFICE without taking a test. $2.00. CIC, Box 675K, North Bergen, NJ 07047.

JOBS IN HAWAII. How to find. Change your life. Send $4.00 to: HAWAII NOW, Box 1348, Kihei, HI 96753. Guarantee.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send $19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.

GOVERNMENT SURPLUS

GOVERNMENT HOMES for as little as $1.00. For information send $1.00 to: Turrin Associates, Box 2215-F, Clifton, N.J. 07011.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Catalog. Hypnotism, Hypnotic cassettes, sleep learning. Become the person you truly want to be. DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.

HYPNOSIS. Cassette Tapes individually made. State problem clearly. Send check or M.O. $15.99. MKH, 2220 E. Monterey Way, Phoenix, AZ 85016. 30 Day Guarantee.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW $25,000 "OVERNIGHT". Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-ST, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

LOANS BY MAIL—Cont'd

VISA® Obtained Easily! Been Turned Down? Bankrupt? No Credit? No Problem! Write Immediately for Details! Credit-DP786, Box 2289, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

SIGNATURE Cash Loans! Application Rushed! Plus the Most Exciting Financial Techniques to get you Cash! MBG-DP786, Box 2298, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

MAILING LISTS

COMPUTERIZED—opportunity seekers. Adhesive labels. Guaranteed! Deliverable! 500/$25; 1000/$40; 5000/$175. Dealer's Co-Operative, 4158-I Calhoun, Gary, IN 46408. (219) 838-7099. Visa/Mastercard.

HIGH QUALITY MAILING LISTS. ALL *CATEGORIES. ZIP CODE ORDER.* GUARANTEED DELIVERABLE. For Fast Details: Joseph Langer, Breakwater Road, Mattituck, New York 11952-0247.

MAILORDER OPPORTUNITIES

GET "TONS" OF MAIL. Year round your mail box stuffed with FREE MAGAZINES, Books, Samples, Opportunities, etc, Years' WORLD-WIDE service only $5.00. Satisfaction guaranteed. MAILMASTERS, EQ-1, Box 704, JFK Int. Airport, N.Y. 11430.

MEMORY IMPROVEMENT

INSTANT MEMORY...NEW WAY TO REMEMBER. No memorization. Release your PHOTOGRAPHIC memory. Stop forgetting! FREE information. Institute of Advanced Thinking, 845DP ViaLapaz, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.

MISCELLANEOUS

OLD-TIME RADIO—The best shows on reels or cassettes. Best quality, fastest service. Catalog $1.00: P.O. Box 3509, Lakeland, FL 33802.

MISCELLANEOUS—Cont'd

WINNING can come from KNOWING! "Statistical Report on 2400 Poker Hands," $3 Postpaid. SCRIBE, Box 7173, Bismarck, ND 58502.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisemetns. You'll receive faster delivery.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

"1,000'S WEEKLY"! $ECURING/$TUFFING ENVELOPES! $TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: ASSOCIATES, #210-DPG, MAPLE GLEN, PA 19002.

EASY Business, earn $1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

STOP STRUGGLING! Learn money making secrets. Experts reveal PROVEN systems. No gimmicks. Free proof. Crossroads, Box 5097-I, Babylon, NY 11704.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for $500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 5938, Richardson, Texas 75083.

PERSONAL

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

MEET that Special person for friendship, love or marriage. Confidential. Free Details. Write: Pentronics, P.O. Box 467EQ, Washington, Iowa 52353.

JAPANESE PENPALS! Want to correspond with Japanese high school students? Send your name, address, birthday, sex, hobbies and $3 to: TEGLET, 2-37-4 Nakadai, Itabashi-ku, Tokyo 174, Japan.

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people! 18-80, Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

CHRISTIAN SINGLES OUTREACH. Local/Worldwide—Phone/Mail Introductions. Free Information/Fast Service. Write: Box 9020-TM, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

SINGLES, US/WORLDWIDE, seek enlightened correspondence, sincere friendships. SCANNA INTERNATIONAL-CO3, Box 4, Pittsford, NY 14534.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS, worldwide, want correspondence, friendship, marriage. Details, photos free! Rothe, Box 270/D, Berlin 61, W. Germany.

SALESMEN—DISTRIBUTORS

WATKINS Products, Flavoring, Seasoning and Spice Business, High Profits, New Market Plan: Clayton & Associates, Saguaro Lake Ranch, 13020 Bush Hwy., Mesa, Arizona 85205.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

STAMP COLLECTING

30 WILD ANIMALS only 25¢ to introduce our Foreign Approvals. Weblor, 140A Elm, No. Reading, MA 01864.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

TOYS, GAMES, ENTERTAINMENT

MYSTERY GAMES CATALOG; Send Sase to: Games Only Emporium, 200 Third Street, New Cumberland, Pennsylvania 17070.

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR FICTION COMBINATIONS:

OR TRY ONE OF OUR OTHER COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $59.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.95 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $2.95 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example. One 20 word ad $59.00 x 3 months = $177.00 x .85 = $150.45)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$59.00**	(2) **$59.00**	(3) **$59.00**	(4) **$59.00**	(5) **$59.00**
(6) **$59.00**	(7) **$59.00**	(8) **$59.00**	(9) **$59.00**	(10) **$59.00**
(11) **$59.00**	(12) **$59.00**	(13) **$59.00**	(14) **$59.00**	(15) **$59.00**
(16) **$59.00**	(17) **$59.00**	(18) **$59.00**	(19) **$59.00**	(20) **$59.00**
(21) **$61.95**	(22) **$64.90**	(23) **$67.85**	(24) **$70.80**	(25) **$73.75**
(26) **$76.70**	(27) **$79.65**	(28) **$82.60**	(29) **$85.55**	(30) **$88.50**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

NEXT ISSUE...

14 *NEW* stories—including

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Captain Leopold)

LAWRENCE BLOCK (about a package tour)

ISAAC ASIMOV (about Griswold)

JUNE THOMSON (about a mother's boy)

WILLIAM BANKIER (about paternity)

PETER TURNBULL (about a death in Glasgow)

JAMES POWELL (about Ganelon II)

JANWILLEM van de WETERING (about a law student)

ELEANOR SULLIVAN ..... *Editor*
CINDY GOLDMAN ..... *Assistant Editor*
RALPH RUBINO ..... *Corporate Art Director*
GERARD HAWKINS ..... *Associate Art Director*
MARIANNE WELDON ..... *Associate Designer*
CARL BARTEE ..... *Director of Manufacturing*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Manager*
VALERIE BARTLETT ..... *Production Assistant*
LOUISE MUGAR ..... *Circulation Director, Retail Marketing*
PRISCILLA GARSTON ..... *Circulation Director, Subscriptions*
JAMES CAULKINS ..... *Circulation Planning Director*
CYNTHIA MANSON *Subsidiary Rights Director*
FLORENCE EICHIN ..... *Permissions & Contracts Manager*
IRENE BOZOKI ..... *Classified Advertising Manager*
JAMIE FILLON ..... *Advertising Manager*

Advertising Sales Office

NEW YORK
212-557-9100

JOEL DAVIS
President & Publisher

LEONARD F. PINTO
Vice President & General Manager

FRED EDINGER
Vice President Finance

PAULA COLLINS
Vice President Circulation

WILLIAM F. BATTISTA
Associate Publisher

ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief (1941–1982)

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 88, No. 1, Whole No. 519, July 1986. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.95 a copy. Annual subscription $19.50 in U.S.A. and possessions; $23.00 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. **Call (614) 383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription.** Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third-class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario.

© 1986 Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN: 0013-6328.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Be the judge and jury for just $1.

Get $155.40 worth of Best Selling Mysteries for $1.

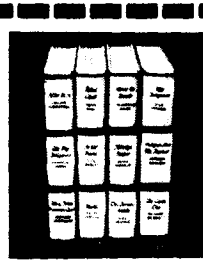
☑ **You get twelve full-length novels for $1.** ☑ **Select only the books you want.**
☑ **Save 60 to 80% off original publisher's prices.** ☑ **Pay no money in advance, ever.**

JUDGE FOR YOURSELF. Our mystery books are the best spine-tinglers anywhere. To introduce you to these gripping tales of suspense and intrigue, we're making this remarkable offer...For only $1, The Detective Book Club will send you these twelve full length novels, each a masterpiece of mystery. Bought separately, these twelve novels would cost you $155.40. For this special trial offer, all twelve are yours, in four handsome, hardcover triple-volumes as shown, for only $1 plus shipping. An incredible value.

SAVE 60-80%. As a member you are GUARANTEED a savings of 60-80% off original publisher's prices. That's a savings of at least $22 for each triple-volume you choose to own. And most importantly, you will select from only the best of the more-than-400 mysteries published yearly. Authors like Brian Garfield, Dick Francis and Hugh Pentecost. For any triple-volume you select, you pay just $9.95 plus shipping...that's only $3.32 for each easy-to-read, unabridged, full-length mystery.

There's No Mystery! There is no mystery to how our club works. Six times a year you will receive, free, the club's Previews describing upcoming selections. As a member, you may reject any volume before or after receiving it.

There is never a minimum number of books to buy, and you may return any unwanted selection within 21 days and owe nothing. And of course, you may cancel your membership at any time. As one of the oldest book clubs in America, we want you to be satisfied. Simply fill out the coupon and return it to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, NY 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me my four triple-volumes shown here, containing twelve mysteries. I enclose no money now. I'll examine them for one week, then will either accept all for $1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive, free, the club's monthly Preview which describes my next selections. I will always have at least 10 days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 21 days and owe nothing. For each volume I keep, I'll send you $9.95 plus shipping. I may cancel my membership at any time. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

6-LC
D24M3V

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, NY 11576

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.
ESTABLISHED 1923

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Note: Members accepted in USA and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A NEW WRITER WHO GOES RIGHT FOR THE JUGULAR."*

BENJAMIN M. SCHUTZ

A NEW LEO HAGGERTY THRILLER

ALL THE OLD BARGAINS

TRADE HARDCOVER $13.95 ISBN: 0-312-94014-9
SEPTEMBER RELEASE

Already Published

"A TAUT THRILLER."*

"First person narration keeps the mystery gripping. Schutz, a clinical psychologist displays in his first novel a fine understanding of the psychotic criminal mind."
—Publishers Weekly

EMBRACE THE WOLF

TRADE HARDCOVER $13.95 ISBN: 0-312-94137-4

■ Get a letter from Leo Haggerty, write dept. LH1

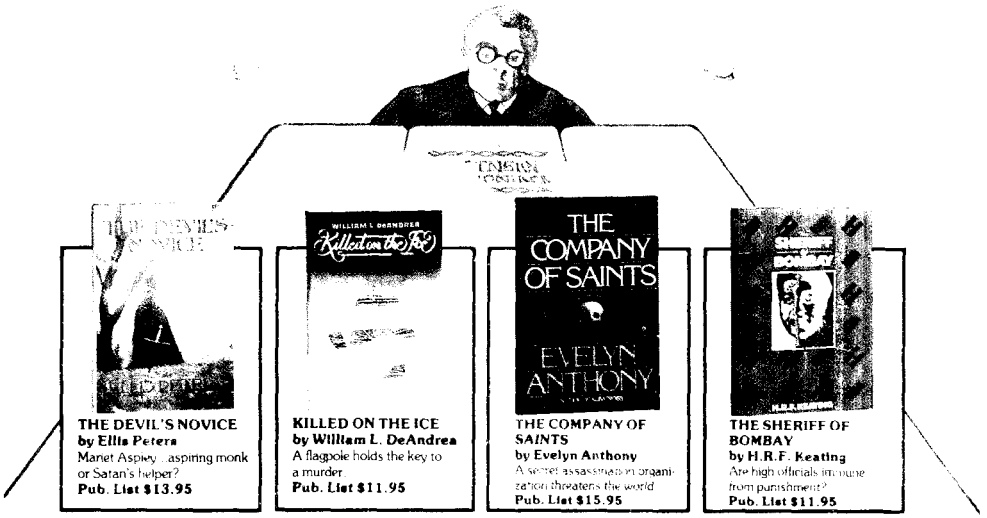
*OCALA STAR-BANNER (FLA)

Jacket art: Jill Baumann

Jacket art: Jill Baumann

Bluejay Books Inc.
1123 Broadway, Suite 306
New York, NY 10010
Distributed by St. Martin's Press in the U.S.A. and by Methuen Publications in Canada

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE DEVIL'S NOVICE
by Ellis Peters
Manet Aspley...aspiring monk or Satan's helper?
Pub. List $13.95

KILLED ON THE ICE
by William L. DeAndrea
A flagpole holds the key to a murder.
Pub. List $11.95

THE COMPANY OF SAINTS
by Evelyn Anthony
A secret assassination organization threatens the world
Pub. List $15.95

THE SHERIFF OF BOMBAY
by H.R.F. Keating
Are high officials immune from punishment?
Pub. List $11.95

I, MARTHA ADAMS
by Pauline Glen Winslow
A suspenseful cross country race to save America.
Pub. List $12.95

THE GARBAGE COLLECTOR
by Aaron Marc Stein
High society European romp with Matt Erridge and murder.
Pub. List $11.95

THE PRICE OF SILENCE
by Hugh Pentecost
The hunter now becomes the hunted.
Pub. List $12.95

EMILY DICKINSON IS DEAD
by Jane Langton
A centennial celebration unleashes arson, deceit and murder.
Pub. List $13.95

A LEGACY FROM TENERIFE
by Noah Webster
The Canary Islands contain a fortune worth killing for.
Pub. List $11.95

NECESSITY
by Brian Garfield
To live, Mattie LaCasse must "die."
Pub. List $13.95

A LOVELY DAY TO DIE
by Celia Fremlin
Thirteen choice mystery morsels to enjoy.
Pub. List $11.95

ROOT OF ALL EVIL
by E.X. Ferrars
Felicity Silvester's death foretold —prank or prophecy?
Pub. List $11.95

RECEIVE 12 MYSTERIES FOR JUST $1.

For details see last page.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED